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The Nation.

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THE NEW ATHEISTS

TOWARD A REVIVAL OF SECULAR HUMANISM
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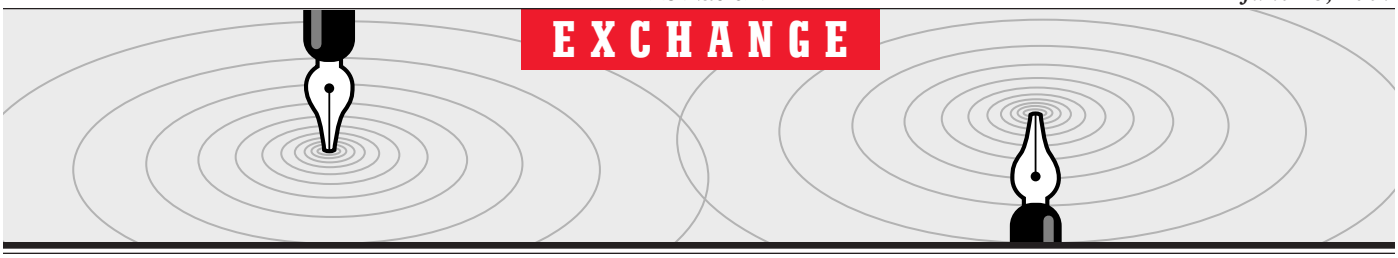

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

Church of Free Trade's Apostates

Arlington, Va.

■ Inspired by the controversial work of William Baumol and Ralph Gomory, William Greider argues that those of us who oppose protectionism today are mindless members of "the church of global free trade" ["The Establishment Rethinks Globalization," April 30]. But it is Greider and his ilk who are blinded by a faith wholly at odds with reality. If it were true that the developing world's large supply of highly skilled but low-paid workers inevitably attracts capital away from high-wage countries such as the United States, foreign direct investment in open developing countries would be higher than in the United States. It's not. In 2006, China attracted $46 of FDI per capita; India attracted just over $14 per capita; the United States attracted $578 per capita.

DONALD J. BOUDREAUX
Chair, department of economics
George Mason University

Denver

■ The Church of Free Trade has a jealous god who, like Moloch, requires the sacrifice of our children. I'm happy to see opposition to its doctrines gaining strength. DOUG KRETZMANN

Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

■ Neither of Gomory's proposals to discipline multinationals in the US national interest is likely to work without international cooperation. A unilateral attempt by the United States to balance its trade will almost certainly provoke a trade war with other nations and could trigger a worldwide depression. In other words, the only effective way to serve the US national interest is through international negotiation. And this requires an agreed multilateral framework for the management of the world economy in the global social interest. Addressing poverty, social exclusion and environmental degradation, and equitable sharing of the benefits of globalization, would be the main objectives.

NORMAN GIRVAN
University of the West Indies

Los Angeles

■ William Greider's article brought to mind the image of Robert Owen (1771–1858), the English utopian socialist whose management of large factories made him a critic of capitalist industry. Owen thought education was the way to mitigate the horrors of the industrial revolution. He thought he could convince the industrialists to make the factories more humane and strengthen the economy at the same time.

Now Greider thinks Ralph Gomory, once a senior vice president at IBM, can convince the multinationals to make changes that will benefit US workers and strengthen the economy at the same time. Gomory's plan will mean abandoning the "pure trade" theory by passing tax restraints on industry. It seems utopian to believe that the multinationals would accept such limits. As long as there is so much cheap labor worldwide, American workers will be sacrificed.

ANTHONY GARAVENTE

Claremont, Calif.

■ When globalization was introduced to the American people, we were told that, among other things, it would lead to increased democratization around the world, that any jobs lost would be defunct "twentieth-century jobs" such as low-end manufacturing, and that America was the land of high-end information-based "twenty-first-century jobs."

This fairy tale was introduced by corporate types whose agenda should be obvious to any adult and by politicians whose only discernible difference from prostitutes is which appendages they spread to service their customers. As is obvious to all, the jobs being lost are moving ever higher up the food chain; the people crying out today are the same ones who took the bait dangled, cared not at all for the plight of low-skilled Americans but instead gleefully snapped up the products of poorly paid Asian labor with not a thought or care about the long-term consequences. MICHAEL T. NOLA

Mechanicsburg, Pa.

■ I was surprised to read how Ralph Gomory, an ex-IBM executive, now sounds like someone who discovered religion. I guess when one begins to see the impact on one's family he begins to see the error of his ways. Now what am I to do with his analysis, which I figured out way back when I was employed by IBM and became part of Gomory's slash and cut? I would not support him in any efforts for change, because I do not see the problem-creator being the solver when it is out of self-interest for his grandchildren. The reformed usually become zealots attempting to work out some redemption. EARL HENRY

Warren, Vt.

■ William Greider's article, while appreciated, still falls short of economic reality. I speak as a peasant, making $10.50 an hour with no health benefits. My job cannot be outsourced. We peasants don't need to be rich. We want a healthy life, including emotional, spiritual and aesthetic values. We are needed to do the mundane jobs. We need to be paid a decent amount to do these jobs. We shouldn't go broke because we are injured or sick.

The present economic system is broken. It puts gross economy before human beings instead of the other way around. One can talk about the goods and bads of globalization, but until we change the political/economic mindset of our own society, no significant progress will be made. And until economists can rid themselves of the sectarian capitalist mindset, they will keep jumping from one wrong conclusion to the next. ROBIN LEHMAN

Baltimore

■ An Indian or Chinese worker has a right to the same employment opportunities as an American worker. (If you don't believe that, what are you doing reading a progressive magazine?) In that light, the spirit animating the argument for protecting American workers is not terribly different from what defenders of slavery and of Jim Crow argued. DAVID BORINSKY

Charleston, WV

■ I am grateful to William Greider for offering hope that globalization can yet be reined in. This will be one of the most daunting challenges of the twenty-first century. Recently, an editor of *Forbes* was here in Charleston spouting all the predictable fables Greider characterizes as the "orthodoxy" of the "free market apostles." Regrettably, in states like West Virginia there is virtually no established school of eloquent reformers to pierce the prevailing pretensions. Despite the economic realities most workers and families are living, the opinions held by conventional economists go unchallenged, are offered as truth and therefore become fact.

Greider, Gomory and others offer alternatives and solutions to the destruction wreaked by globalization. Like them and so many others, I don't want ours to be remembered as the generation that lowered the standard of living for future generations of Americans.

NANCY GUTHERIE
Representative
W.Va. House of Delegates, 30th District

Weare, NH

■ Great article. While there are many, many important issues in front of us, I believe Gomory identifies an issue that could have the deepest impact on the economic future of our country. This is truly a bipartisan issue, and one that can be acted on. I encourage *The Nation* to add this to your Act Now blog, and to give your readers the vehicle to petition/write letters to

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Printed June 6 Volume 284, Number 25

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EDITORIALS

The Great Pretender

The legacy of the Bush Administration will be measured not just by the destruction it unleashed in Iraq but by the hatred of the United States that its other policies have ignited around the world. The June G-8 meeting of industrialized nations provided a chance to undo some of this damage and reassert American internationalism. Instead, the Administration chose to pursue a phony internationalism, wrapping its contempt for the concerns of other nations in a ribbon of false global goodwill. In this guise the Administration continued its earlier attacks on international law and cooperation—from its spurning of the Kyoto Protocol to its rejection of the International Criminal Court and its withdrawal from the antiballistic missile treaty.

The Administration's last-minute proposal on climate change, although a welcome admission of the problem, was a case in point. Recommending only vague, voluntary targets for controlling greenhouse-gas emissions, George W. Bush's initiative clashed with German Chancellor Angela Merkel's call for mandatory UN-imposed caps. A "Trojan horse," according to Germany's environmental minister, Bush's plan would actually undermine international efforts to combat global warming.

Similarly, Bush's call for $30 billion over the next five years to fight the global AIDS epidemic was intended to spur increased commitments from other wealthy nations. But although the United States leads the world in dollar contributions, Bush's expanded AIDS plan has all the flaws of his original one. Largely bypassing the multilateral Global Fund, Bush has created a parallel and redundant program that, against the international public health consensus, continues to insist on abstinence-only education and restrictions on needle exchange.

The Administration's approach to Iran and nuclear nonproliferation is another case in point. The White House's support for the EU-3 talks and efforts to win UN Security Council sanctions against Iran may seem to be in the spirit of internationalist cooperation. But up close it looks more like an attempt to further Bush's commitment to regime change and domination of the Persian Gulf—the very policies that may be driving Iran's uranium-enrichment program. As long as the United States refuses to talk with Tehran about nuclear proliferation or to provide it with the security reassurances it needs, the White House sabotages the multilateral approach it now says it wants to champion.

The White House's handling of Russia is further evidence of cynical internationalism. Putin's Russia may have become a semi-authoritarian state, but that's no reason to disregard Russia's legitimate concerns. Washington plans to install antimissile bases in Poland and the Czech Republic, on top of its earlier expansion of NATO into former Soviet republics and the build-up of US bases in Central Asia. As we warned in these pages a year ago, this is an open invitation to a new cold war in Europe. Bush is rushing to deploy a technology that does not work against a threat that does not exist, all the while destroying what remains of arms control and disarmament. Russia's help is critical to resolving regional conflicts, stopping the spread of weapons of mass destruction and combating terrorism. But this matters little to the Bush Administration.

Intended to demonstrate "American leadership around the world," Bush's feint at internationalism only further exposes how deeply entrenched he is in unilateralism and US exceptionalism. Such "diplomacy" stands alongside Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo as hallmarks of America's eroding global leadership.

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COMMENT

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The Nation (ISSN 0027-8378) is published weekly (except for the second week in January, and biweekly the third week of July through the second week of September) by The Nation Company, L.P. © 2007 in the U.S.A. by The Nation Company, L.P., 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003. (212) 209-5400. Washington Bureau: Suite 308, 110 Maryland Avenue N.E., Washington, DC 20002. (202) 546-2239. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Subscription orders, changes of address and all subscription inquiries: The Nation, PO Box 55149, Boulder, CO 80322-5149, or call 1-800-333-8536. Publications Mail Agreement No: 40041477. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to Circulation Dept. or DPGM, 4960-2 Walker Road, Windsor, ON N9A 6J3. **When ordering a subscription, please allow 4-6 weeks for receipt of your first issue and for all subscription transactions**. Basic annual subscription price: $52 for 47 issues. Back issues $4 prepaid ($6 foreign) from: The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003. The Nation is available on microfilm from: University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Nation, PO Box 55149, Boulder, CO 80322-5149. Printed in U.S.A. on recycled paper.

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Jackal Time

Mergers and acquisitions, commercial loans, IPOs, bonds, *fraud*: Yes, fraud may be the new Wall Street profit center if two judges of the US Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit have their way. They ruled that the banks were immune from liability despite participating in and profiting from Enron's myriad fraudulent schemes.

Enron was the most spectacular corporate fraud in a time of jackals. Kenneth "Kenny Boy" Lay and his cohorts cooked the books, cashed out more than $1 billion in holdings and bilked hundreds of thousands of small investors out of their savings. Some executives were found guilty and are serving time. Led by the University of California Regents, investors sued the executives, accountants and banks involved in defrauding them.

Mervyn "Buddy" Schwartz worked for thirty years as a mechanic on the Hershey candy company assembly line. When he retired, his son, a financial adviser at Merrill Lynch, told him that Merrill was touting Enron. So Buddy invested heavily in the company. When Enron collapsed, he lost it all. Gone was the plan for a retirement place in Arizona with his wife. Gone were the small funds he hoped to leave his grandchildren. He joined the shareholders suit, hoping to recover something from those who concocted the schemes that helped Enron cook its books. To avoid embarrassment, several of the banks settled with the plaintiffs.

But Merrill Lynch and a number of others held out. The suit was headed to trial when the Fifth Circuit, in a two-to-one decision, ruled in March that although the banks had participated in and profited from the fraudulent schemes, they were not liable. Using words to evoke Dickens's "the law is a ass," the two judges ruled that the "factual probability that the market relied on the banks' behavior…does not mean that plaintiffs are entitled to the legal presumption of reliance." After all, the judges wrote, "the banks only aided and abetted [Enron's] fraud by engaging in transactions to make it more plausible; they owed no duty to Enron shareholders." Their schemes were a public lie, but they made no other false statements directly to shareholders. The two judges confessed that "our ruling…may not coincide…with notions of justice and fair play," but to rule otherwise would open the "floodgates" to litigation by defrauded investors. For these "justices," allowing banks to participate in fraud risk-free is preferable to requiring them to help police the market.

Consider Merrill Lynch. It was peddling Enron stock through brokers like Buddy's son. But at the same time, its investment side was cooking up a deal to inflate Enron's finances. In one of many deals, Merrill agreed to "buy" a power plant floating off the coast of Nigeria from Enron in time for the "profits" to be reported in Enron's year-end financial statement, while secretly contracting to sell the plant back to Enron at a higher price six months later. The fraudulent transaction was designed solely to falsify Enron's books, generating fake profits that Merrill's own brokers were touting in driving up the price of the stock.

The issues in the Enron scandal are now before the Su-

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preme Court in a separate case. In early June, after a furious lobby drive that included regulators from thirty states, the Securities and Exchange Commission apparently decided to stand with the defrauded investors. The *Washington Post* reports that the SEC, in an act that is still not public, asked the Solicitor General to file in support of the investors.

Enron, WorldCom and hundreds of other companies and banks engaged in the worst corporate thievery in history. Companies cooked their books, aided by banks, accountants and lawyers, while senior executives backdated their pensions and cashed in before the truth came out.

Never has the need for legal accountability been clearer. It would be perverse beyond imagination if the Supreme Court were to ignore simple justice and the weight of the SEC and make fraud the new profit center for Wall Street's banks. That would give new meaning to the term "bank robbers."

ROBERT L. BOROSAGE

Robert L. Borosage is co-director of the Campaign for America's Future.

Neoconned Again

One vote decided the race for World Bank president: that of the only world leader who thought neoconservative lothario Paul Wolfowitz was doing a heckuva job managing the troubled lender of last resort for developing nations. So it came as no surprise that voter in chief George W. Bush chose a Wolfowitz with an even sharper bite, former US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick, to create the impression of change while maintaining the substance of the Bank's operations.

Even before Wolfowitz had secured his generous severance agreement, Bush pointedly refused to bow to calls by Brazil, Australia and reform-minded Europeans to end what Ute Koczy, the German Green Party's development policy spokeswoman, describes as the "wretched tradition" of letting the United States pick the World Bank boss while the European Union selects the International Monetary Fund leader. And Bush certainly was not going to heed demands from developing nations and activist groups for real change in how the Bank does business.

Sure, there was talk about picking a new president with a track record of showing concern for the Bank's impoverished clients, someone like former US ambassador to the United Nations John Danforth or former Iowa Representative Jim Leach. But Danforth or Leach might have taken seriously the notion that the point of reforming the Bank is to get more clean water, food, housing and medicine to the planet's neediest people. That wasn't a perspective the Bush team was looking for. They wanted someone who could be counted on to keep the Bank working within the safe confines of neoconservative theology and a Wall Street worldview. Zoellick fit the bill, as both a smoother operator than his couldn't-organize-an-envelope-opening predecessor and a truer believer in the mantras of forced privatization, structural adjustment and free trade. "The best that can be said" for Zoellick, argues Sameer Dossani, director of the 50 Years Is Enough Network, "is that, like Wolfowitz, he'll be an appropriate symbol of what the World Bank has become—an agency dedicated to entrenching US economic domination."

Starting as a protégé of former Secretary of State James Baker, Zoellick made his mark as the privatization-preaching personal representative of Bush Senior at G-7 summits in 1991 and 1992. In recognition of his service, the investment firm Goldman Sachs hired Zoellick as a senior international adviser in the mid-1990s. But his primary work during the Bush family's wilderness years involved outlining the second Bush Administration's foreign policies. Zoellick was a signer, with Wolfowitz, of the 1998 Project for the New American Century letter urging then–President Clinton to get busy on "the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime from power." As an original Vulcan—the name taken by the group that taught W. everything he knows about international affairs—Zoellick asserted the futility of employing "reason or goodwill" to tackle "evil in the world" in a January/February 2000 *Foreign Affairs* essay.

Zoellick practiced what he preached as the Administration's economic hit man during W.'s first term, negotiating trade pacts that paved the way for multinational corporations to country-hop in a race-to-the-bottom search for lower wages and laxer regulations. As irascible as he is shameless (in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Zoellick fashioned the Administration's bizarre demand that Congress rubber-stamp trade deals as part of the "war on terror") the Trade Representative smeared labor, environmental and human rights groups that seek humane trade and development policies as "anti-globalization nihilists."

Zoellick was no friendlier to developing nations that sought to make the World Trade Organization a more transparent and benevolent institution. In his dealings with the WTO "he earned a reputation as a powerful bully in middle- and low-income countries," recalls Jessica Walker Beaumont of the American Friends Service Committee. "His condescending lectures about 'can-do and won't-do nations' at the 2003 WTO summit in Cancún, when the US didn't get its way, became notorious. It's hard to imagine that, after defending US corporate profits so zealously, this is the person who is going to champion development on behalf of the world's poor."

Zoellick apologists cite his brief tenure at the State Department, when he dealt creditably with the Darfur crisis. But they conveniently forget that after expressing frustration with what he considered a low-prestige assignment, he exited State to rejoin Goldman Sachs as a managing director. Few who have seriously observed Zoellick over the years doubt that once his appointment is approved by a Bank board dominated by the United States and its European partners, the new president will indulge his penchant for corporate-friendly fixes such as forced privatization. He'll be a determined proponent of "shock therapy" schemes, which use the muscle of the Bank and the IMF to make poor countries barter off essential public services to the highest bidder. Thus there is good reason to believe that John Cavanagh, veteran Bank watcher and director of the Institute for Policy Studies, will be proven right when he warns, "Paul Wolfowitz might not go down in history as the worst president of the World Bank."

JOHN NICHOLS

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COMMENT

Summer Lunch Crunch

Summer is here, and school will be out for more than two months. For many low-income families, that's bad news. Not only do their kids have little or nothing to do, but it can be an especially hungry time for them. Approximately 16 million children receive free or reduced-price meals during the school year from the National School Lunch Program, but only a shamefully small fraction of them receive a free lunch or breakfast during the summer either from a summer extension of the NSLP or through the separate Summer Food Service Program.

Started in 1968 primarily as a way to move children into summer activities, the summer food program has never fed more than a small proportion of the children who needed meals. In recent years, the number of children in the programs has averaged fewer than 3 million, less than 20 percent of the number who receive federally funded lunches during the school year; almost half the states—including Texas, Florida, Michigan and Ohio—scored less than 15 percent in the summer of 2005. Since all children who show up for the activities are fed, regardless of whether they need the free meals, the number of low-income children served during the summer may well be fewer than even these dismal percentages. Moreover, most of these programs operate for only part of the summer, so the number of free meals actually served is probably less than a tenth of what would be provided were the summer service to reach all the children covered by the school-year program for the full vacation.

Even more troubling is that the number of children receiving lunch during the summer has steadily gone down in recent years, dropping to 2.8 million in 2005 from a high of 3.1 million in 2000, even though the number of needy children has gone up by 1.3 million during those years, as poverty levels have risen. A recent report by the US Conference of Mayors found that in the twenty-three cities surveyed, requests for food assistance by families with children increased by an average of 5 percent in 2006.

The current summer food programs are not likely to do much better. Under the Summer Food Service Program, which is the main one, the Agriculture Department reimburses qualified sponsors—school systems, recreational programs and other public or nonprofit organizations—for meals served at sites chosen to maximize access to low-income children. It appears, however, that many, if not most, poor parents don't know these programs exist, and even when they do, they often find it hard to get the children to them. Also, finding sponsors and sites is difficult because the reimbursement rates for the food are inadequate (they were cut in 1996 as part of the assault on welfare), the qualification criteria are strict and the administrative requirements cumbersome. Finding volunteers to staff the sites is not easy either, especially in poor neighborhoods, where many people are working two or three jobs just to get by.

A more rational summer food program would not depend on getting the children to the food but on getting the food to the children. Not directly, which could raise complicated distribution problems, but in the same way food is provided today through the food stamps program: by making electronic benefit cards available to all children eligible for the National School Lunch Program, for use by their parents at participating food outlets. This would eliminate the parent-awareness problem, the search for sponsors and sites, the elaborate red tape and the reimbursement inadequacy. Summer school and other activities would continue, but the sites where only food is provided could be abandoned.

The chances of such a program being adopted, however, are nil. Food advocates are struggling to hold on to what they have in the face of Bush Administration efforts to cut food stamps and other social programs, so that even a limited pilot program has little or no chance of being adopted.

Some improvements can be made, however. The District of Columbia has had a remarkably high participation rate in recent years. Through a strong grassroots marketing program that starts at the beginning of the school year and uses community organizations, ads at local movie theaters, supermarket in-store announcements, and a steady stream of fliers, radio and TV ads, the District reached an 84 percent participation rate at 376 sites last summer. Much of what it does is not expensive and can be replicated by other local governments and school systems.

Congress could also improve the summer food program. For example, legislation sponsored by Senator Richard Lugar in 2000 that cuts the paperwork and increases reimbursement rates has significantly raised participation in the nineteen states that were previously at the bottom. That legislation can and should be extended to all fifty states. So far Congress has refused because the estimated cost range is $25–$75 million over five years. That's $5–$15 million a year, barely a flyspeck on the federal budget.

Malnutrition affects a child's ability to learn, her physical and emotional health, and overall prospects for a decent life. A nation that can find hundreds of millions—billions—of dollars for tax cuts for the rich, military adventures and bridges to nowhere can surely afford to feed its hungry children. HERMAN SCHWARTZ

Herman Schwartz, professor of law at the Washington College of Law, American University, is the author of Right Wing Justice *(Nation Books).*

CALVIN TRILLIN

Alberto Gonzales Is Still at His Post

Alberto Gonzales is still at his post,
He's loyal, and that's what his boss prizes most.
He's lied to the Congress, but that's no big deal
Compared with the fact he has proven that he'll
Do just what he's told—say that torture's just fine
Or, quoting Ms. Goodling, "cross over the line."
As loyal as someone sworn into the mob,
Gonzales is doing a heckuva job.

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After Willie Horton

As the last presidential contenders throw their hats into the ring for 2008, it's fruitful to recall another presidential race, twenty years ago, which was dominated by someone not on the ballot: "Willie" Horton. It wasn't George H.W. Bush who first aimed this coded racial appeal against Michael Dukakis. It was Al Gore, running to Dukakis's right in the Democratic primaries, who hammered the Massachusetts Governor over his prisoner furlough program. When Gore and Clinton were running four years later, Clinton tried to banish the ghost of Dukakis by flying back to Arkansas to preside over the execution of Rickey Ray Rector, who demonstrated his fitness for execution by asking his jailers to save some of the pecan pie from his last meal so he could eat it later.

By 1990 only a handful of Democrats who opposed the death penalty remained in statewide office. They had learned the Willie Horton lesson all too well: They would not be outtoughed on crime. With Democrats offering little resistance, right-wing politicians used crime as a wedge issue to dislodge the pillars of the Great Society.

While these profiles-in-no-courage were being etched in Washington, grassroots activists were moving steadily in the other direction. A combination of careful policy and advocacy work and state budget exigencies has brought us near a tipping point: Many elected officials have come to the conclusion that we may have gone as far as a society can toward locking up its people. Signs are everywhere that the prison-industrial complex is beginning to crack:

§ Measures like California's Prop 36, which offer drug treatment instead of incarceration, have passed in several states.

§ Rhode Island, Iowa and now Florida have restored some measure of voting rights to former prisoners.

§ Jurisdictions from Connecticut to Kentucky have spearheaded a "justice reinvestment" movement to divert funds from prison and parole to prevention and social support.

§ Grassroots organizations like the Ella Baker Center, Critical Resistance, Grassroots Leadership and the Prison Moratorium Project are building vocal constituencies among the most affected communities—African-Americans, Latinos and youth—dedicated to stopping prison growth.

§ Formerly incarcerated people are leading their own organizations, like All of Us or None and the NuLeadership Policy Group, to challenge the barriers that confront people returning to their communities from prison.

§ National advocacy organizations like the Sentencing Project, Families Against Mandatory Minimums, the Justice Project and the Justice Policy Institute are reshaping public debate through sophisticated research and communications strategies.

Yet mass incarceration and all its collateral consequences remain a central and appalling feature of American society. Reversing a trend with such deep roots in our history, culture and political system, and on which so many economic interests have come to depend, requires a serious long-term effort. Unfortunately, in the story that everyone from advocates to donors weave about the rise of the right, race and crime rarely make an appearance. The hard-right foundations like Scaife, Bradley and Olin, the propagandistic and bombastic media like Fox and Rush Limbaugh, the ground troops of the Christian right—all these play starring roles, but not Richard Nixon's Southern strategy of recruiting Southern whites to the GOP by playing the race card. Criminal justice reform has been nearly absent from the progressive agenda that has taken shape in recent years, supported by a rash of new think tanks created to counter the hard right. And it has yet to appear as a priority for the Democrats now running Capitol Hill—or running for President.

Nevertheless, we have an opportunity for change now. In last fall's elections, for the first time in a long time, fear of crime barely made an appearance as a wedge issue. The challenge is to push criminal justice reform into the debate as 2008 heats up. No progressive future can be built on the backs of prisoners or by collective amnesia about the Faustian bargain both parties have made over the past four decades. GARA LAMARCHE

Gara LaMarche is president and CEO of the Atlantic Philanthropies.

FAREWELL, TONY AND CARM

On Sunday, June 10, Tony Soprano will pull out of the Lincoln Tunnel and onto the New Jersey Turnpike one last time, marking the beginning of the end for the iconic HBO creation that bears his name. Whatever *The Sopranos* owes to *The Godfather* and *GoodFellas*, it has always been its own animal. Instead of a romanticized portrayal of the Mafia, *The Sopranos* often gave us a brutal and diminished anachronism. Says George De Stefano, who has written about the show for this magazine: "In *The Godfather: Part II*, Hyman Roth says to Michael Corleone, 'We're bigger than US Steel.' On *The Sopranos*, we have gangsters fighting over stolen power tools and provolone."

Our identification with Tony is perverse but logical. He is battling over a shrinking pool of garbage-collection routes, a troubled marriage and the cost of a bourgeois lifestyle, so it's no wonder we first meet Tony squeezed uncomfortably into a plush armchair in his therapist's office. We could never forgive him his many sins, but for eight years we shared with him the insecurities of class and status so deeply ingrained in the American experience. If the Corleones were bigger than the giant of American industry, then the Sopranos have been the perfect fit for our deindustrialized present. If *The Godfather: Part II* is a revisionist take on the 1950s American Dream, then *The Sopranos* is our elegy to that long-gone era of postwar affluence and suburban fantasy.

As Tony remarks to Dr. Jennifer Melfi during their first session, "Things are trending downward," and as we begin our final hour with Tony and his two families, it's hard not to feel a similar sense of loss. MAX FRASER

Max Fraser is at work on The Nation Guide to The Nation.

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ALEXANDER COCKBURN

Dissidents Against Dogma

We should never be more vigilant than at the moment a new dogma is being installed. The claque endorsing what is now dignified as "the mainstream theory" of global warming stretches all the way from radical greens through Al Gore to George W. Bush, who signed on at the end of May. The left has been swept along, entranced by the allure of weather as revolutionary agent, naïvely conceiving of global warming as a crisis that will force radical social changes on capitalism.

Alas for their illusions. Capitalism is ingesting global warming as happily as a python swallowing a piglet. The press, which thrives on fearmongering, promotes the nonexistent threat as vigorously as it did the imminence of Soviet attack during the cold war, in concert with the arms industry. There's money to be made, and so, as Talleyrand said, "Enrich yourselves!"

The marquee slogan in the new cold war on global warming is that the scientific consensus is virtually unanimous. This is utterly false. The overwhelming majority of climate *computer modelers*, the beneficiaries of the $2 billion-a-year global warming grant industry, certainly believe in it but not necessarily most real climate scientists—people qualified in atmospheric physics, climatology and meteorology. Geologists are particularly skeptical.

Take Warsaw-based Professor Zbigniew Jaworowski, famous for his critiques of ice-core data. He's devastating on the IPCC rallying cry that CO_2 is higher now than it has ever been over the past 650,000 years. In his 1997 paper in the Spring *21st Century Science and Technology*, he demolishes this proposition.

Or take Dr. Habibullo Abdussamatov, of St. Petersburg's Pulkovo Astronomical Observatory. He says we're on a warming trend but that humans have little to do with it, the agent being a longtime change in the sun's heat. He says solar irradiance will fall within the next few years and we may face the beginning of an ice age. The Russian scientific establishment gave him a green light to use the nation's space station to measure global cooling.

Now read Dr. Jeffrey Glassman, applied physicist and engineer, retired from California's academic and corporate sectors, who provides an elegant demonstration of how the CO_2 solubility pump in the Earth's oceans controls atmospheric CO_2 concentrations, and how the increase in atmospheric CO_2 is the consequence of temperature increase, not the cause.

Move to that bane of the fearmongers, Dr. Patrick Michaels, on sabbatical from the University of Virginia, now at the Cato Institute, who has presented in papers and recently his book *Meltdown* demolitions of almost every claim made by the greenhousers, particularly regarding hurricanes, tornadoes, sea rise, disappearing ice caps, drought and floods. Michaels is often slammed as a hired gun for the fossil fuel industry, but I haven't seen significant dents made in his scientific critiques.

One of the best essays on greenhouse myth-making from a left perspective comes from Denis Rancourt, an environmental science researcher and professor of physics at the University of Ottawa. I recommend his February 2007 essay "Global Warming: Truth or Dare?" on his website, Activist Teacher, which has also featured fine work by David Noble on the greenhouse lobby.

The Achilles' heel of the computer models, the cornerstone of CO_2 fearmongering, is their failure to deal with water. As vapor, it's a more important greenhouse gas than CO_2 by a factor of twenty, yet models have proven incapable of dealing with it. The global water cycle is complicated, with at least as much unknown as is known. Water starts by evaporating from oceans, rivers, lakes and moist ground, enters the atmosphere as water vapor, condenses into clouds and precipitates as rain or snow. Each step is influenced by temperature and each water form has an enormous impact on global heat processes. Clouds have a huge, inaccurately quantified effect on heat received from the sun. Water on the Earth's surface has different effects on the retention of the sun's heat, depending on whether it's liquid, which is quite absorbent; ice, which is reflective; or snow, which is more reflective than ice. Such factors cause huge swings in the Earth's heat balance and interact in ways that are beyond the ability of computer climate models to predict.

The first global warming modelers simply threw up their hands at the complexity of the water problem and essentially left out the atmospheric water cycle. Over time a few features of the cycle were patched into the models, all based on unproven guesses at the effect of increased ocean evaporation on clouds, the effect of clouds on reflecting the sun's energy and the effect of cloud warming on rainfall and snow. All of these equations are hopelessly inadequate to describe the water cycle's role.

Besides the inability to deal with water, the other huge embarrassment facing the modelers is the well-established fact that temperature changes first and CO_2 levels change 600 to 1,000 years later. The computer modelers as usual have an involuted response: They say the temperature increase is initiated by the "relatively weak" effect of increasing heat from the sun, as per Milankovitch. That effect initiates the warming of the oceans, which—just as Dr. Martin Hertzberg says—releases lots of CO_2. The CO_2 is the real culprit because it amplifies the relatively weak effect of the sun, turning minor warming into a really serious matter.

This is a cleverly concocted gloss which would be a wonderful argument for demonstrating that once warming starts, CO_2 will make it worse and worse. Unfortunately for the climate modelers, the history of the Earth tells us that it doesn't get worse and worse. The cyclical Milankovitch decrease in the sun's heat starts some thousands of years later. The warming stops, reverses and an ice age ensues. Obviously the excess CO_2 must disappear due to some "feedback" that the modelers haven't thought of yet, i.e., one that keeps the Earth's climate in rough equilibrium.

If the public swallows this new greenhouse dogma, it won't just be carbon taxes on an airline ticket. It will be huge new carbon offset charges for the alleged carbon savings of the immensely expensive nuclear plants they're so eager to build to give a cooler, cleaner world to your grandchildren. ■

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KATHA POLLITT

Tough Luck, Ladies

Do you know how much your colleagues earn? I thought not. You probably know more about your co-workers' sex lives than you do about what's in their pay envelopes. Unless they volunteer the information, or leave their pay stubs lying out on their desk, it can take years to learn that someone else is being paid more than you for the same work, if you ever do. My lucky break came decades ago at another magazine when I was inadvertently mailed someone else's check. How often do the postal gods help out a worker like that?

But now, ladies—and all of you whose color, religion or national origin leave you open to prejudice—you can just quit your fussing. In *Ledbetter v. Goodyear*, the Supreme Court All-Male Five just ruled that unless you figure out that you are the victim of pay discrimination within 180 days of said discrimination's commencement, it doesn't matter. You're too late. While decades' worth of previous judgments have always held that each discriminatory paycheck constituted a new act for purposes of meeting Title VII's six-month deadline, the Roberts Court holds that only the original one counts. Six months into being screwed over by your boss, pay discrimination is your own damn fault—like so much else in life! Those small initial discrepancies you suspected but accepted because you wanted the job and figured you'd fix them later when you'd made yourself indispensable? Too bad for you, Ms. Don't Sweat the Small Stuff, Mr. Gotta Show Them I'm a Team Player. You should have peeked at the white guy's paycheck sooner—much sooner. During her nineteen years at Goodyear, Lilly Ledbetter—the only woman in the group of sixteen at her level—remained unaware that her male colleagues were raking in hefty raises while she received meager ones. By the time she found out, she was close to retirement.

At least the Court recognized, albeit grudgingly, that discrimination does occur. For some time, conservatives have argued that what look like rather large pay differentials—around 75 cents on the male dollar—actually reflect women's "choices." Women earn less because they choose to become daycare workers instead of parking valets and pediatricians instead of heart surgeons; because they "opt out" of the workforce for family reasons; because even if men and women do the same work, the women show up late and go home early. They just don't care about their jobs like the men do. If you ignore everything you know about how the world actually works—something conservative economists are very good at doing—this line can even appear persuasive.

The Independent Women's Forum puts out a regular stream of disinformation to explain away unequal pay. "What they call 'choices' are not unconditioned by discrimination," Heidi Hartmann, head of the Institute for Women's Policy Research, told me on the phone. "If a woman knows a field is unfriendly to women, she is less likely to go into it. If she knows she has less chance of promotion, she may decide she and not her husband should stay home with the baby. Choices are not made in a vacuum."

True enough. But now we can forget all that obfuscatory conservative flimflam. We're back to square one: Discrimination exists—when she retired Ledbetter was making $6,700 a year less than the lowest-paid man at her level. But so what? By not figuring it out right away, by trusting your employer, by following the mossy pathways of company procedure, you've given your consent. You're almost like a woman who gets date-raped because she thought the guy was a friend. I'll bet *her* chances in the Roberts court wouldn't be so good either.

If we can't rely on the courts—to which George W. Bush continues to propose cave dwellers like Leslie Southwick even as I write these words (he's the one who thinks the N-word is acceptable workplace speech and that bisexual mothers should lose custody)—there's always the law of unintended consequences. A lot more women and minorities may bring suit first, rather than try to work things out politely with their employer, as right-wing antifeminists are always advising women to do if they feel, no doubt mistakenly, that they have a grievance. For those who believe the feminist movement marginalized itself by taking its eye off the dollar, this is the perfect opportunity to get back to economic issues that have cross-class appeal. Economic populists take note: You might want to add eliminating sexist and racist pay discrimination to your definition of the common good. And those who think feminism is no longer necessary might want to consider the connection between *Ledbetter* and the Court's upholding of the so-called Partial-Birth Abortion Ban. Putting women back in their box, anyone?

The good news is that *Ledbetter* is one decision that can be remedied through legislation, as Justice Ginsburg pointed out in her stinging dissent. Within days of the decision, Democrats moved to address the ruling with new legislation, with Hillary Clinton in the lead. (Hmmm, isn't she supposed to be the all-corporate big-bucks candidate who should be siding with the Chamber of Commerce on this? Maybe there's something to this sisterhood stuff after all.)

Meanwhile, wish good luck to the women of Wal-Mart in their ongoing legal battle and to the 1,500 women executives of General Electric suing the company for sex discrimination. And to Justice Ginsburg, lonely voice of sanity and justice, *Centi anni!*

* * *

As usual around this time, I'm passing the hat for the Bosnian Initiative Frankfurt, a German group that runs fantastic summer camps in Bosnia for Bosnian and other ex-Yugoslav children and weeklong gatherings in Germany for Israeli and Palestinian youth. *Nation* readers have been a mainstay of this effort, which helps the cause of peace by breaking down ethnic barriers. All amounts are welcome, but $150 makes you a "godparent," supporting a child's "vacation from war." Send checks made out to "Bosnian Initiative Frankfurt" to me, c/o The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003, and I will forward them (www.vacation-from-war.com). ■

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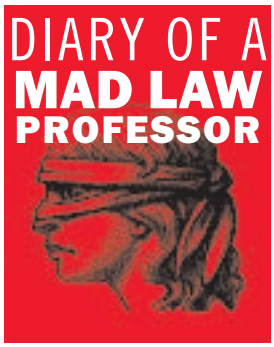
PATRICIA J. WILLIAMS

Divining Demeanor



There was an intriguing little article in the June 11 issue of *People* magazine, titled "Dog Discrimination?" Apparently, your average big black dog ("known in the rescue world as a BBD") is much less adoptable than other dogs and "definitely more at risk of going to death row than a yellow or tan dog." According to Jacque Lynn Schultz, of the ASPCA, this is in part because of their dark fur: "They look menacing—people can't read their facial expressions as easily."

The superficialities of appearance count for a lot in our society. We seem to attach more meaning to the aesthetic norms of exterior looks than to substantive evaluations such as beneficence of disposition, rationality of thought or generosity of action. While first impressions may count for something in some circumstances, the haruspication of character from looks alone is vastly overrated and generally misleading. Study after study has documented the unreliability of witness identification. Study after study has shown the degree to which race, class, suggestion, personal bias, fatigue, whimsy and stress can skew results. The work of the Innocence Project, whose use of DNA tests has exonerated so many of the mostly dark faces on death row, is only the most recent documentation of the frequency with which catastrophic mistakes about stereotyped demeanor do happen.

Indeed, the responsible use of forensics (whose fallibility is another story) has highlighted the contrast among differing methodologies of fact-finding on display in modern courtrooms. Scientific truth-seeking is a process, an inquiry, a series of tests that are reproducible. Scientists hold themselves open to a wide, sometimes endless range of variables that might contribute to cause and effect, right down to the clichéd flapping of butterfly wings in the Amazon causing storms in British Columbia. Truth to lawyers, on the other hand, is a "due" process, an obligatory series of steps that re-enact or recapture an event that occurred in another time and place. Its goal is closure rather than eternal exploration.

Both science and law have their meta-worlds—the lab, the courtroom—and each sets up controls against the influence of extraneous matter, as in the sterilization of equipment or rules that exclude hearsay. If science is rooted in empiricism, the trial is to some extent a theatrical enterprise. Philosopher Susan Haack has likened proof in the courtroom to a quasi-religious proceeding, historically traceable to the dunking of suspected witches to see if God would save them before they drowned; law professor Jessie Allen has analogized it to the kind of sequential rituals of mask and incantation that give certain traditions of magic their social power. We dress judges in robes, we raise our hands, we swear on a Bible. Then comes the peculiar process of evaluating "demeanor": studying the bodies of parties and participants—their faces, their fidgety fingers—for outward signs of lying, for any shiftiness that will reveal the certain discomfort God and conscience will manifest in them if they are knowingly breaking an oath taken in the name of the divinity.

In a case just handed down from the Supreme Court, *Uttecht v. Brown*, the divination of demeanor has been elevated to new heights. The case challenged the dismissal of a juror "for cause" after he had expressed some ambivalence about the general application of the death penalty. The issue in the case is the undisputed right of a defendant to a trial before jurors who are willing to follow the law of capital punishment regardless of any personal qualms they may have about the death penalty. The juror was questioned extensively and asserted at least six times that he believed in the death penalty and would apply it faithfully as instructed by the court. Nevertheless, because the juror expressed a belief that the death penalty shouldn't be used "ten times a week" as well as some initial confusion about whether the defendant was eligible for parole, the trial court found him "substantially impaired" and ineligible to serve. Ninth Circuit judge Alex Kozinski, a staunchly conservative defender of the death penalty, struck down the trial court's ruling, based on the clear assertions of the juror in question. Nevertheless, the Supreme Court, in a 5-to-4 decision, overruled Kozinski, opining that "the trial court makes a judgment based in part on the demeanor of the juror, a judgment owed deference by reviewing courts. Deference to the trial court is appropriate because it is in a position to assess…demeanor…a factor of critical importance in assessing the attitude and qualifications of potential jurors. Leading treatises in the area make much of nonverbal communication."

The decision is disturbing, not least because the trial court never made any mention of demeanor. In his dissent, Justice Stevens wrote, "There is absolutely nothing in the record to suggest…that anything about Juror Z's demeanor would dull the impact of his numerous affirmative statements about his ability to impose the death penalty in any situation. In effect, the Court reads something into nothing and defers to a finding that the trial court never made." Justice Breyer reiterated distrust of the majority's reliance upon "courtroom 'atmospherics,' such as facial expressions or vocal hesitations or tones of voice [as] sufficient to warrant excusing Juror Z for cause."

The impact of the *Uttecht* decision is broader than it might appear. Most obvious, it gives huge latitude to prosecutors to pick jurors who express only an unqualified and enthusiastic embrace of capital punishment, a result clearly at odds with the legal principle—endorsed even by the majority—that "a criminal defendant has the right to an impartial jury…that has not been tilted in favor of capital punishment by selective prosecutorial challenges for cause." Another consequence of this decision is that it makes *any* appellate review of trial court decisions extremely difficult. If superior courts can't evaluate a trial proceeding based on what is clearly spoken into the record, if the plain meaning of official transcripts is now to be trumped by deference to imagined sweaty palms and invisible furrowed brows, then one does not have to look at death row for dogs to know where this will lead us. ■

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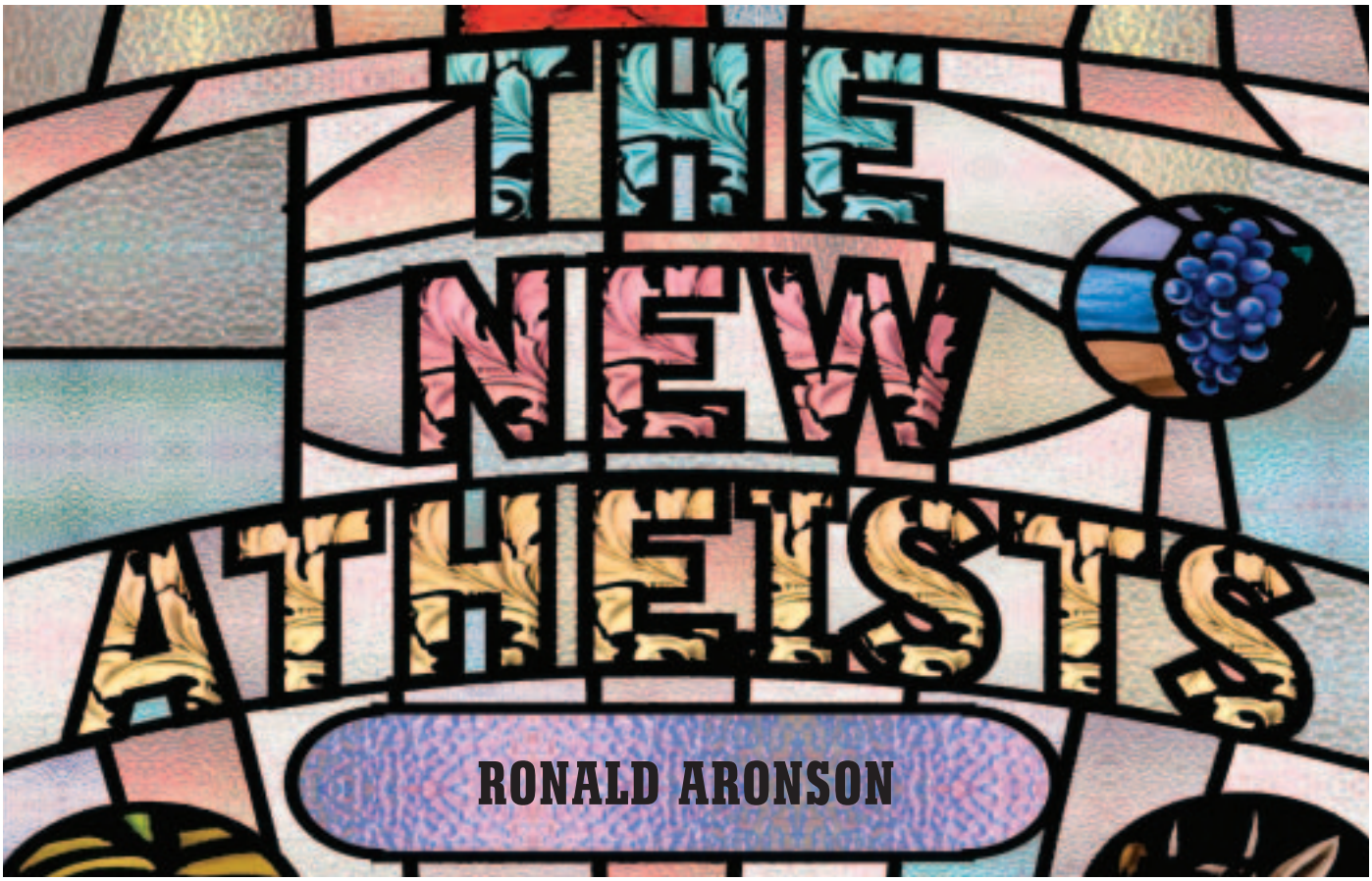
ARTICLES



What began with publisher W.W. Norton taking a chance on a gutsy, hyperbolic and idiosyncratic attack on religion by a graduate student in neuroscience has grown into a remarkable intellectual wave. No fewer than five books by the New Atheists have appeared on bestseller lists in the past two years—Sam Harris's *The End of Faith* and *Letter to a Christian Nation*, Daniel Dennett's *Breaking the Spell*, Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion* and now Christopher Hitchens's *God Is Not Great*. The scandalized media have both attacked and inflated the phenomenon. After the *New York Times Book Review*, for example, ran a thoughtful review of Harris and then a negative front-page review of Dawkins, the daily paper published two weak op-ed attacks on the writers and a vapid article on how atheists celebrate Christmas, followed by tongue-in-cheek admiration in the *Book Review* for Hitchens's ability to promote his career by saying the unexpected.

Despite such dubious blessings, the four have become must-read writers. The most remarkable fact is not their books themselves—blunt, no-holds-barred attacks on religion in different registers—but that they have succeeded in reaching mainstream readers and in becoming bestsellers. Is this because Americans are beginning to get fed up with the religiosity of the past several years? It would be comforting if we could explain this as a cultural signal of the end of the right-wing/evangelical ascendancy. Such speculations are probably wishful thinking—book buyers are such a small slice of the population that few sociologists would stake their careers on claiming that book buyers' preferences reflect anything like a national mood.

The success of the New Atheists may, however, reflect something significant among their audience. In the past generation in the United States, atheists, agnostics and secular humanists have been a timid minority—almost voiceless, often on the defensive, routinely derided, both warned against and ignored. As Susan Jacoby pointed out in her book *Freethinkers*, it is symptomatic of the situation that the most dramatic presidential address in generations took place in the National Cathedral three days after September 11, 2001, so filled with religious language that it sounded like a sermon. It was delivered by a President flanked by Jewish, Muslim and Christian representatives, a model of religious inclusiveness, without anyone standing alongside them representing the tens of millions of nonreligious Americans. At this most important collective moment in our recent history, it was as if they did not exist. This is what the polls are telling us: Virtually everyone in America believes in God.

We know how zealously the conservative Christian denominations have politicized themselves in the past generation, how the GOP has harnessed this energy by embracing their demands—opposing stem-cell research, gay marriage and abortion rights, championing government aid to religious schools and faith-based social programs—and by appointing sympathetic judges. So effectively have they framed the issues that, according to the Pew Research Center's 2006 report on religion and public life, fully 69 percent of Americans believe that liberals have "gone too far in trying to keep religion out of schools and government."

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THAT'S WHY SO MANY SOMEBODIES READ IT.

Mike Farrell is a longstanding* Nation *reader.

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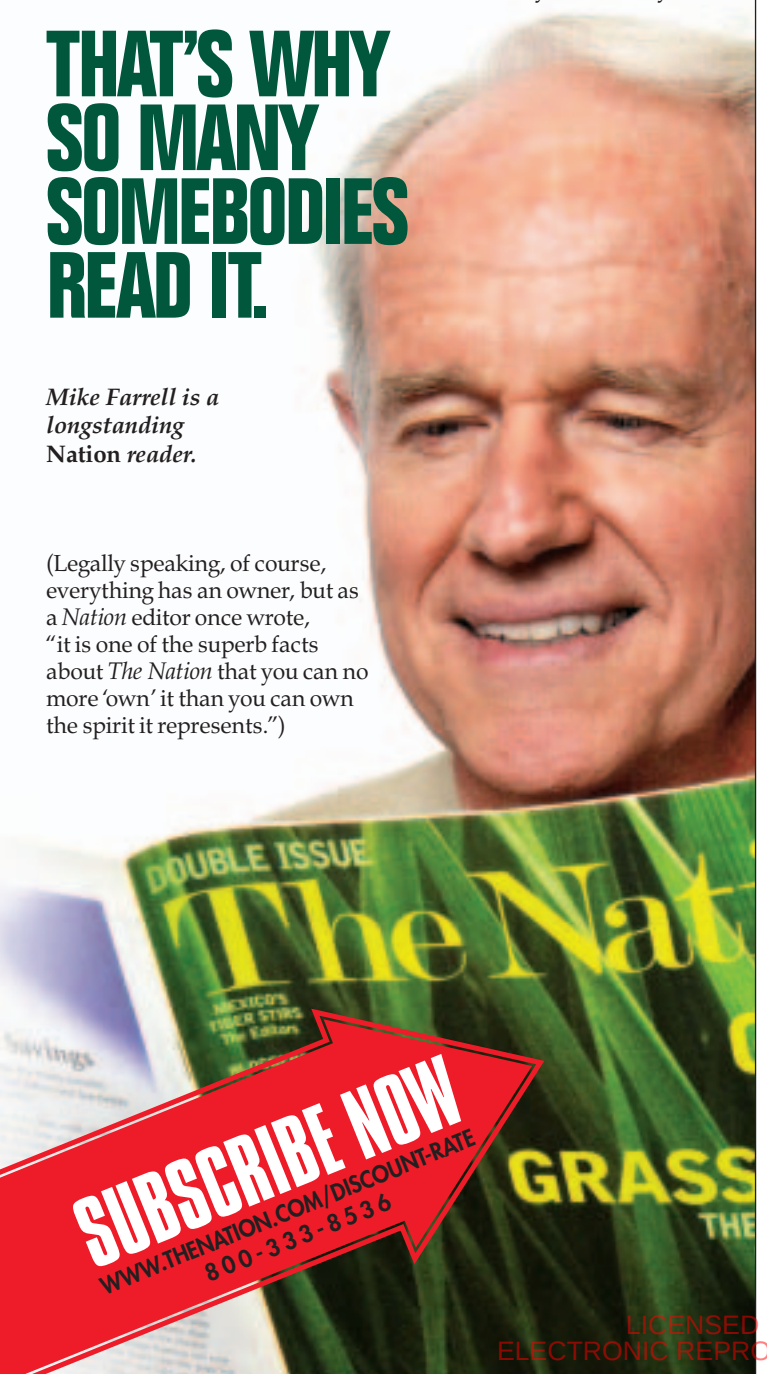

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We commonly hear that only a tiny percentage of Americans don't believe in God and that, as a *Newsweek* poll claimed this spring, 91 percent do. In fact, this is not true. How many unbelievers are there? The question is difficult to assess accurately because of the challenges of constructing survey questions that do not tap into the prevailing biases about religion. According to the American Religious Identification Survey, which interviewed more than 50,000 people, more than 29 million adults—one in seven Americans—declare themselves to be without religion. The more recent Baylor Religion Survey ("American Piety in the 21st Century") of more than 1,700 people, which bills itself as "the most extensive and sensitive study of religion ever conducted," calls for adjusting this number downward to exclude those who believe in a God but do not belong to a religion. Fair enough. But Baylor's own Gallup survey is a bit shaky for at least two reasons. It counts anyone who believes in a "higher power" but not God as believing in God—casting a vast net over adherents of everything from spirit to history to love. Yet the study allows unbelievers only one option: to not believe in "anything beyond the physical world," leaving no space for those who regard themselves as agnostics or skeptics, secularists or humanists. Contrast this with a more recent and more nuanced *Financial Times*/Harris poll of Europeans and Americans that allowed respondents to declare agnosticism as well as atheism: 18 percent of the more than 2,000 American respondents chose one or the other, while 73 percent affirmed belief in God or a supreme being.

A more general issue affects American surveys on religious beliefs, namely, the "social desirability effect," in which respondents are reluctant to give an unpopular answer in a society in which being religious is the norm. What happens when questions are framed to overcome this distortion? The *FT*/H poll tried to counteract it by allowing space not only for the customary "Not sure" but also for "Would prefer not to say"—and 6 percent of Americans chose this as their answer to the question of whether they believed in God or a supreme being. Add to this those who declared themselves as atheists or agnostics and, lo and behold, the possible sum of unbelievers is nearly one in four Americans.

All this helps explain the popularity of the New Atheists—Americans as a whole may not be getting too much religion, but a significant constituency must be getting fed up with being routinely marginalized, ignored and insulted. After all, unbelievers are concentrated at the higher end of the educational scale—a recent Harris American poll shows that 31 percent of those with postgraduate education do not avow belief in God (compared with only 14 percent of those with a high school education or less). The percentage rises among professors and then again among professors at research universities, reaching 93 percent among members of the National Academy of Sciences. Unbelievers are to be found concentrated among those whose professional lives emphasize science or rationality and who also have developed a relatively high level of confidence in their own intellectual faculties. And they are frequently teachers or opinion-makers.

But over the past generation they have come to feel beleaguered and, except for rare individuals like comedian and talk-

Ronald Aronson teaches at Wayne State University. His latest book is Living Without God, *to be published next year by Counterpoint.*

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show host Bill Maher, voiceless in the public arena. The great success of the New Atheists is to have reached them, both speaking to and for them. These writers are devoted, with sledgehammer force and angry urgency, to "breaking the spell" cast by the religious ascendancy, to overcoming a situation in which every other area of life can be critically analyzed while admittedly irrational religious faith is made central to American life but exempted from serious discussion.

This does not make for restraint. Harris displays brash self-confidence, Hitchens and Dawkins angry intellectual bite and Dennett an inexhaustible theoretical energy and range of inquiry. Harris excoriates religious moderates, accusing them of providing cover for fundamentalists at home and abroad by refusing to contest the extremists' premises—because they share them. More upbeat, Dennett is devoted to creating the intellectual conditions for future discussions, in which religion will be treated as just another "natural" phenomenon and accordingly subjected to critical scrutiny. Dawkins bulldozes his way through every major argument for religious belief, and a great many minor ones. And Hitchens endlessly catalogues religion's crimes and absurdities. Each man is at war, writing as if no others had preceded him, and with a passion that can only be described as political.

Considerable numbers of Americans, religious and secular, are fed up with the in-your-face religion that has come to mark our society.

Above all, each sees himself as breaking a taboo. This explains not only the vigor and urgency of these books, their mainstream character and their publishing success but also the common refrain in reviews that they have "gone too far." Of course they have, because their many faults are often inseparable from their strengths. Self-indulgence is their common flaw: Dennett and Dawkins might have considered their readers more and disciplined their own need to follow out every line of thought, while Harris is so full of his point of view that he, like Hitchens, is unable to consider faith as anything but stupid. They show little understanding of religion or interest in it [see Daniel Lazare, "Among the Disbelievers," May 28]. Still, I am surprised by the hostility and bemusement expressed toward them by their fellow travelers in *The New York Review of Books*, *The New Yorker* and *The London Review of Books*. In attacking religion the four have been breaking the taboo against talking about it seriously, and they may be forgiven for not being calmer, more expert or more measured. Doing battle with what they see as the most pervasive and bothersome phenomenon in American life during the past generation, Harris, Dennett, Dawkins and Hitchens deserve praise for their courage and tenacity in shattering its spell.

Where does the work of the New Atheists leave us? I hope they have roused a significant portion of America from its timidity. But to what end? Living without God means turning toward something. To flourish we need coherent secular popular philosophies that effectively answer life's vital questions. Enlightenment optimism once supplied unbelievers with hope for a better world, whether this was based on Marxism, science, education or democracy. After Progress, after Marxism, is it any wonder atheism fell on hard times? Restoring secular confidence will take much positive work as well as the fierce attacks on religion by our atheist champions. On a societal level, as Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris point out in *Sacred and Secular*, living without God requires creating conditions in which people are free from the kinds of existential vulnerability that have marked all human societies until the advent of Europe's post-industrial welfare states. Markedly more religious than any of them, the United States provides a life that is far more unequal and far more insecure.

The surprising response to the New Atheist offensive should thus inspire us to think politically as well as philosophically. As a first step this demands creating a coalition between unbelievers and their natural allies, secular-minded believers. I am speaking first about many millions of Americans who nominally belong to a religion but effectively live without any active relationship either to it or to God, or belong to a church and attend services but are "tacit atheists," living day in and day out with only token reference to God. And I also include the many believers who accept the principle of America as a secular society. These include members of the liberal Jewish and Christian denominations, who have long practice in accommodating themselves to science and the modern world and who, as the National Council of Churches website tells us, may remain inspired by Genesis while not needing to take it in "literal, factual terms." Many of these turned up in the most significant finding of the Baylor survey, namely that more than one in four American "believers" does not mean by this a personal God at all but a distant God who has little or nothing to do with the world or themselves. This sounds very much like the deist God of "unbelievers" Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine.

These believers, along with those who think of themselves as "spiritual," as well as professed unbelievers, help to explain why according to the Pew study so many Americans—32 percent—want less religious influence on government. Twenty-four percent say that President Bush talks too much about his religious faith and prayer, and 28 percent deny that the United States is a Christian nation. Most dramatically, a whopping 49 percent believe that Christian conservatives have gone too far "in trying to impose their religious values on the country." This, then, is an unreported secret of American life: Considerable numbers of Americans, religious and secular, are becoming fed up with the in-your-face religion that has come to mark our society.

Until now the most vocal left-of-center response to the Christian right, for example by Sojourners, has been to call for more religion in politics, not less. In early June the group organized a nationally televised forum at which John Edwards, Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton testified to their faith, talking about the "hand of God" (Edwards), forgiveness (Obama) and prayer (Clinton). Few loud-and-clear voices have been agitating in the mainstream on behalf of the separation of church and state, for secular and public education, or demanding less rather than more political discussion of religion. Yet tens of millions of Americans worry about such things.

Whether most of them continue to believe in God matters much less than that they are comfortable with secular knowledge and America's secular Constitution. Barry Lynn, for example,

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executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, is a Protestant minister. Although Harris and Dawkins castigate all believers for sharing the premises of conservative Christians, the fact is that many believers could easily be working with out-and-out atheists and agnostics on key issues.

Such a coalition should take the offensive on behalf of American constitutional promises of a secular society, increasingly under threat from Bush's Supreme Court appointments. It will gain support in unexpected places: Judge John Jones III, a Bush appointee, delivered a devastating blow to the forces behind "intelligent design" in his December 2005 decision in the Dover School Board case. The first half of his impressive decision contains a crystal-clear reflection on what science is and why intelligent design, a refurbished form of creationism, is religion, not science. The second half reads like a whodunit, revealing how a minority on the school board conspired to impose intelligent design on the district. It should be a rallying point for the nearly half of all Americans who are disturbed by right-wing religious attempts to impose their faith on the rest of us. An immediate goal should be a call for the publication and widest possible distribution of the Dover decision. It could become another bestseller—by a conservative judge no less!—and a text for civics, current events, history, law and basic science classes.

A second goal of such a coalition might be a campaign to reorient American thinking about atheists and atheism. In recent polls, far more respondents have declared themselves willing to vote for a woman or African-American for President than for an atheist—atheists are more unpopular than gays. Television news viewers are encouraged to nod in agreement with such ageless gibes as "There are no atheists in foxholes" without seeing just how nasty they are. This obnoxious remark, by Katie Couric on NBC's *Today* show, drew a few complaints and letters, but no wider protests or apology. A coalition determined to widen the range of socially acceptable belief could make a significant difference on such issues.

A broad secular coalition could also demand more nuanced discussion of the range of belief and unbelief in America today. Rather than consciously or unconsciously promoting religious belief, public opinion research should try to register a full range of beliefs, including the interesting and perplexing ways in which people live secular as well as religious lives and their sometimes contradictory combinations. These are rejected by Harris, Dawkins, Dennett and Hitchens, and ignored by the media and mainstream politicians.

Finally, such an alliance could become one place where Dennett's goal of discussing religion openly and critically—as well as atheism and agnosticism—could begin to be realized. A number of questions might be explored: What, for example, is the common ground and what are the differences between believers and unbelievers? And—I save for last the touchiest question of all—shouldn't all Americans be instructed in the great religious and secular traditions, as well as their greatest books? After all, achieving literacy in both religion and secularism might allow us to discuss them more intelligently. ■

WHAT LIFE IS LIKE FOR THE 150,000 GUEST WORKERS WHO TOIL IN THE U.S. TODAY.

Coming to America

FELICIA MELLO

It's late afternoon at the Latin Labor Solutions recruitment office in Monterrey, Mexico, and hundreds of prospective workers are crammed into the narrow alleyway between the office and the building next door, waiting restlessly in the 90-degree heat. They perch on duffel bags or lean against the stucco walls—older cowboys in straw hats and silver belt buckles, young city types in sunglasses and baseball caps. Many have traveled for days, with little sleep, from distant villages. In a few minutes they will discover whether the US Consulate has approved their application for temporary labor visas or if they must return home defeated.

PETER O. ZIERLEIN

Just when the smell of sweat has become unbearable and an impatient whistle travels through the crowd, Salvador Morales, the office's clean-cut, broad-shouldered manager, peeks his head out a door and begins to call names in a booming voice. The first lucky man staggers forward, tired but grinning. A cheer goes up as he takes his passport with the visa stapled to it, as paper-thin and precious as a winning lottery ticket in a country where success in El Norte is the ultimate prize.

These workers, along with more than 150,000 others from countries as close to the United States as Mexico and as far-flung as India and Thailand, are part of an army of foreign low-wage labor legally imported each year by American companies under a government program known as H-2. Created during World War II to provide workers of last resort for agriculture and other seasonal industries, the program has since grown dramatically amid rising demand from employers in a broad range of industries that were never envisioned when the program was created and that can only vaguely be described as seasonal. Guest workers make chocolate in Louisiana, staff hotel desks in Florida and mow lawns in Missouri. They toil in some of the country's most difficult and dangerous industries, from shipbuilding to asbestos removal to forestry.

Felicia Mello is a freelance writer whose work has appeared in Salon *and* The Los Angeles Times Magazine. *Research support was provided by the Investigative Fund of The Nation Institute.*

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Meet the Drug War Winners and Losers

The Winners

Prison Guards - $45,000 a year to start, no college required. In California the Prison Guards Union is the most powerful lobby in the state. Not surprisingly, they support legislators who are "tough on crime."[1]

Prison Owners - $3 billion a year goes to the highly profitable private prison industry whose owners bank on harsh drug laws.[2]

The Drug Testing Industry - Former drug warriors make millions testing our kids for drugs – even though it makes no measurable difference in actual drug use.[3]

Corrupt Police - Confiscation of private property is now a significant source of police funding. It's up to the accused to prove it wasn't from drug money.[4]

The Pharmaceutical Industry -Several major drug companies are frantically researching the cannabis plant for pain-killing and anti-nausea compounds that can be patented – while simultaneously spending millions on P.R. to keep the plant itself illegal.[5]

Terrorists - $320 billion a year in tax-free illegal drug sales worldwide – enough to fund the worst things you can think of.[6]

The Losers

Education - As prison budgets grow, the money has to come from somewhere – like schools, teachers and students. The U.S is now losing ground to Europe and Asia in education, but we're still #1 in incarceration at three times the world average.[7]

Public Safety - Prohibition creates crime. Criminals need safe turf. So they take over the inner cities by terrorizing the powerless and defenseless residents. Try to imagine this happening in upscale neighborhoods.[8]

Police Departments - Drug corruption scandals are rocking police departments all over the country because of the staggering amount of loose cash in play.[9]

Equality - Only 13% of the country's drug users are African American but they're twice as likely to get arrested as whites and four times as likely to do prison time.[10]

The Children - With such a high percentage of minority parents in prison, who's supposed to be raising their kids? What will be the "blowback?"[11]

70% of the war is about marijuana. Isn't it time we tried peace?

Common Sense for Drug Policy
www.CommonSenseDrugPolicy.org www.DrugWarFacts.org
www.ManagingChronicPain.org www.MedicalMJ.org
www.TreatingDrugAddiction.org
info@csdp.org

For footnotes see http://www.csdp.org/publicservice/winner_notes.htm

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While unfamiliar to most Americans, the program has become the template for an expanded guest-worker program now being hotly debated in Congress. Proponents of the plan argue that temporary labor visas give immigrants greater rights and protections while providing employers with a reliable labor force. Yet workers, labor organizers, lawyers and policy-makers say the history of the H-2 visa delivers a very different lesson. They charge that a program designed to open up the legal labor market and provide a piece of the American dream to immigrants has instead locked thousands of them into a modern-day form of indentured servitude. Congressman Charles Rangel has called guest-worker programs "the closest thing I've ever seen to slavery."

Brought in to work for specific companies on stints of up to a year, guest workers cannot legally leave their jobs even when their employers are abusive. While some earn enough to buy a house or open a business in their home countries, others accrue crushing debt to labor contractors who demand thousands of dollars in fees to connect them with US employers. The Labor Department does not enforce the conditions guaranteed by employers in visa petitions, and there is little recourse for those who are cheated out of promised wages or work hours. Often living in isolated communities where few people speak their language, guest workers rarely complain about mistreatment.

Critics of the existing guest-worker program charge that it locks thousands into a modern-day form of indentured servitude.

"Many guest workers have told us [their situation] is worse than being undocumented," says Mary Bauer, a lawyer with the Southern Poverty Law Center who has filed several class-action suits on behalf of guest workers. "The employer controls the worker's right to be in the United States. And that creates a dramatic disparity in power between the worker and the employer."

As labor unions and immigrant advocates agonize over whether to support a new guest-worker program, many such workers' fates are being decided in court. Dozens of lawsuits accuse H-2 employers and labor contractors of abuses ranging from failing to pay minimum wage to firing visa holders when they become injured. Several of the suits emerged from Southern states where lax enforcement of labor laws and a small undocumented population have encouraged an influx of guest workers to perform jobs once largely held by African-Americans. Along the Gulf Coast, guest workers involved in post-Katrina reconstruction have formed a new group, the Alliance of Guestworkers for Dignity, to press for better working conditions and oversight.

But most of the people gathered at Latin Labor Solutions (LLS) today—the farmers from Veracruz, the construction workers from Michoacan—are not thinking about these large policy debates. They are thinking about their futures. If they receive visas, their journey north will be different from those of the estimated 400,000 Mexicans who enter the United States illegally each year. There will be no treacherous, throat-parching march through the desert, backpacks on their backs, bandits at their heels. Instead they will board air-conditioned buses that will deliver them directly to jobs in the United States, where they hope to earn enough to provide for themselves and their families. Monterrey is the first step. Here is where their dreams begin.

"Where we are there's very little work," Ana Maria Méndez, 25, tells me. She and a cousin made the eighteen-hour car trip from their small town in Veracruz, where most people subsist on homegrown corn and beans. Now Méndez fidgets nervously on a chair in the LLS waiting room, her short hair pinned back from her round face, wondering aloud whether she'll be allowed to take the $8-an-hour job she's been offered with a landscaping company in Missouri, a place she's never been. To get there, she mortgaged the house where her husband and two children still live to pay $1,000 in travel costs and fees.

"Even if they turn me back, I'm going to go," she says. "I would go illegally. I'm scared, but to come all this way and go back with nothing would be worse."

Méndez's debt is not unusual. If guest workers' dreams begin in their home countries, say advocates, so does the abuse. With visas in high demand, H-2 workers can pay recruiters thousands of dollars in fees for the privilege of being matched with a US employer. While some of that money covers legitimate expenses like bus fare and the $200 government charge for visa applicants, the rest lines the pockets of middlemen. Guest workers from Asia have paid up to $20,000 for their jobs; in Mexico, the going rate ranges from $300 to $2,000, according to local officials, just below the cost of hiring a coyote.

Here in Monterrey, a bustling hub of international commerce, a quasi-legal trade in cross-border labor is quietly thriving. There are high-tech outfits like LLS, with its new computers and six branch offices, and there are unmarked houses where cash changes hands in moldy back rooms. With little oversight, labor recruiters are free to make inflated promises and to charge whatever they choose for their services.

"There's always someone looking to commit fraud," says Alejandra Ocádiz, director of the Office of Migrant Assistance for the state of Nuevo Leon. In one among many cases of wrongdoing by recruiters her office investigated last year, one company, Aicotramex, placed ads asking candidates to submit their passports and $650 for a "pre-authorized" appointment at the US Consulate. After dozens of people paid up, the company's office closed and its owners disappeared.

Recruiting agencies enjoy particular leverage because of the rules governing H-2 visas: Workers need a job offer from a US company before they can receive a visa. Once they get the permit, they must remain employed at that company only. Take a job somewhere else, and they're immediately considered illegal. Upset their boss—or that employer's agent—and they risk not being requested the following year.

At LLS, one of Monterrey's largest recruiting agencies, workers submit their names and contact information to an electronic database. A kind of Match.com for low-wage labor, the program allows employers to view workers' photos and search by categories that, along with skills and home state, include gender and marital status. On the trip north, the company's chartered buses, equipped with GPS tracking units, send signals back to the computer system. Company owner Jeff West shows me a screen with a neon line indicating the path of a bus transporting agricul-

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Dangerous times demand courageous voices. Bob Avakian is such a voice.

Bob Avakian combines an unsparing critique of the history and current direction of American society with a sweeping view of world history and the potential for humanity. He has brought forth a fresh, relevant and compelling approach to Marxism, deeply analyzing the history of the Communist movement and the socialist revolutions and upholds their achievements. At the same time, he honestly confronts and criticizes what he views as their shortcomings, opening up new paths of inquiry in the process and initiating dialogue with people who hold a wide range of views. He's addressing the burning problems before society from a unique vantage point, and we consider his revolutionary analysis and solutions to be an important and necessary part of the ferment and discourse required in this society and the world in this dark time. While those of us signing this statement do not necessarily agree with all of his views, we have come away from encounters with Avakian provoked and enriched in our own thinking, and we invite others to hear and engage that voice.

Bob Avakian is also the leader of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA; as such he not only theorizes about the world, but plays a special role in organizing and leading that change. He's been called a "long-distance runner in the freedom struggle against imperialism, racism and capitalism" and he draws on deep connections and engagement with people from all walks of life and all corners of the earth. All this informs and animates his work.

Unfortunately, such voices in this country are, and have been, all too frequently the objects of suppression and repression. This repressive edge in American society has been particularly brought to bear against those who advocate revolution and especially those who do so effectively. Surveillance, harassment, suppression, political trials, prison terms, exile and even assassination have been the fates of many revolutionaries throughout U.S. history and many of those measures have, in fact, been visited upon Avakian. The current administration has instituted serious repressive measures like the Patriot Act, instituted the use of preventive detention and isolation of those whom the president deems to be "terrorist," and has created a climate where, for example, radical or even liberal professors find their reputations and even their livelihoods under assault; all this makes the ability of Bob Avakian to freely function even more of a concern. The statement by the German pastor Martin Niemoller – which begins, "First they came for the communists, and I did nothing because I was not a communist" and which goes on to describe how Niemoller did nothing while Hitler peeled away the victims of the Nazi regime one at a time, until there was no one left to defend Niemoller when his time came – sounds with particular resonance today.

Thus, in addition to calling on people to engage with the thoughts of Bob Avakian, and bring them into what needs to be a rich and diverse dialogue, we are also serving notice to this government that we intend to defend his right to freely advocate and organize for his views, and to engage broadly with people about those views.

Initial list of signatories: Charles Aikens, journalist, *Oaktown News*,* / **Jaafar Aksikas**, Prof., Cultural Studies, Columbia College*, / **Aladdin**, actor, comedian / **Bob Anderson**, Prof., College of New Mexico* / **Rafael C. Angulo**, Assoc. Clinical Field Faculty, USC* / **Bernardo Attias**, Prof., CA State Univ., Northridge* / **Fr. Luis Barrios**, John Jay College* / **Robert Bloom**, attorney / **Herb Boyd**, author, journalist / **Anne Bray**, artist / **Leroy Bryant, Sr.**, Prof. and Chmn. Emeritus, History, Philosophy, Political Science, African-American Studies, Chicago State Univ.* / **Kevin Burgess**, Black Vietnam Vet / **Rev. Richard Meri Ka Ra Byrd**, KRST Ctr. of African Spirituality* / **Angelica Carapia**, Editor, *Laney Tower** / **Robert Keith Collins, PhD**, Homalusa: Ctr. for African and Native American Research* / **Jeff Cooper**, Dir., Freshman & Transfer Summer Progs., UCLA* / **Chuck D** / **Jesse Diaz, Jr.**, UC Riverside* / **Victor Diaz**, Principal, B-Tech* / **Lynn Domingo**, human rights activist / **Derek Dorsey**, music publisher, co-owner, The Fire* / **Judy Drummond**, teacher / **Richard Duardo**, artist / **Quentin Easter**, theater producer / **Rev. Jon Eckels**, poet, human rights activist / **Dick Eiden**, Dir., North County Forum* / **Sonny Espinoza**, Prof., Loyola Marymount Univ.* / **Jeffrey Felshman**, writer / **Leslie Fields-Cruz**, media arts administrator / **Joe Fortunato**, attorney and NJ Green Party* / **reg e. gaines**, director / **Jim Geraghty**, Marin Peace and Justice Coalition* / **Lois Gish**, nurse-midwife / **Bill Goodman**, civil rights lawyer / **Connie Grappo**, theater director / **Tom Harker**, singer, songwriter / **Julia Butterfly Hill**, activist, author / **Jack Hirschman**, SF Poet Laureate / **Danny Hoch**, actor, playwright / **Rachel Holmes**, author / **Phil Hutchings**, civil & human rights activist / **John Hutnyk**, Academic Dir., Ctr. for Cultural Studies, Goldsmiths Univ. of London* / **H. Range Hutson, MD**, Harvard Medical School* / **Dr. Tony Jackson**, professor / **Bill Jennings**, It's About Time Committee* / **Russ Jennings**, radio producer / **Talbert Jennings**, producer, *Carl Stokes Forum**, Community TV / **Steve Johnson**, activist, thinker, writer / **Larry S. Jones**, retired adjunct iinstructor, Chaminade Univ.* / **Rickie Lee Jones**, singer, musician / **Pa Joof**, Africans On the Move* / **Paul Kangas**, Vice Pres., Veterans for Peace* / **Erin Aubry Kaplan**, journalist, writer / **Yuri Kochiyama**, civil rights activist / **Rev. Earl Kooperkamp**, St. Mary's Episcopal Church* / **David Kunzle**, Prof., UCLA* / **Mike Ladd**, writer, producer / **Michael Lange**, actor, playwright / **Aron Laub**, attorney / **Kenny Leon**, theater director / **Calvin Levels**, actor, playwright / **Brian Lloyd**, Dept. of History, UC Riverside* / **Dennis Loo**, Assoc. Prof. of Sociology, Cal Poly Pomona / **Raymond Lotta**, Maoist political economist / **Fr. Lawrence Lucas**, Our Lady of Lourdes Roman Catholic Church* / **Paul Magno**, Catholic Worker Movement* / **Lucia Marano**, actor, writer / **Bill Martin**, Prof. of Philosophy, DePaul Univ.* / **Timothy Patrick McCarthy**, Harvard Univ.* / **Peter McLaren**, Prof. of Education, UCLA* / **David Meyerhof**, teacher / **Alan Miller**, teacher, Berkeley H.S.* / **Eric Mofford**, filmmaker / **Will Napoli**, teacher, writer, artist, inventor / **Not a Number**, store, Seattle / **Susan Nussbaum**, actress / **Heriberto Ocasio, MD** / **Denise Oliver**, Prof. of English, Cuyahoga Community College* / **Tomás Olmos**, civil rights attorney / **Claire Ortalda**, novelist / **Gary Pak**, Prof. of English, Univ. of Hawai'i* / **Jose Palafox**, lecturer, UC Santa Cruz* / **Hal Perry**, basketball player / **Peter Phillips**, Prof. of Sociology, Sonoma State Univ.,* Dir. , Project Censored* / **Townsand Price-Spratlen, PhD**, sociologist / **Jerry Quickley**, playwright / **Ruth Reese**, Cleveland State Univ.* / **Phil Rice, MD**, Harvard Medical School* / **DJ Riddm** / **Wilson Riles, Jr.**, former Oakland City Councilman / **Walter Riley**, attorney / **Tara Rivera**, librarian / **Victoria Robinson**, lecturer, UC Berkeley* / **Al Ronzoni**, Progressive Democrats of America* / **Floyd Salas**, author, poet / **Dorothy Salem**, Prof. of History / **Ricardo Salinas**, actor, Culture Clash* / **Thomas Willy Sepe**, artist / **Elias Serna**, lecturer / **Nick Setka**, bookseller / **Adam Shapiro**, *Current Events* WRFG* / **C. Zadik Shapiro**, attorney / **Joann Shapiro**, theater artist / **Herbert Siguenza**, Culture Clash* / **Henry Silverman**, Prof. and Chairperson Emeritus, Dept. of History, Michigan State Univ.* / **Rick Simonson**, Elliott Bay Book Co.* / **Ted Sirota**, musician / **Michael Slate**, host & producer KPFK*, journalist *Revolution* / **Jimmy Slater**, Black Panther Party* / **Tolbert Small, MD**, George Jackson Free Clinic for the Black Panther Party* / **Sparrow**, poet / **Lynne Stewart** / **Ula Taylor**, Assoc. Prof., UC Berkeley* / **Dwight Trible**, musician / **Daniel Tsang**, KUCI *Subversity Show** / **Katherine Turner**, St. Vartan Armenian Church* / **Morrie Turner**, cartoonist / **Kinan Valdez**, writer & director, El Teatro Campesino* / **Jose Luis Valenzuela**, Artistic Dir., Latino Theater Co.*, Prof. of Theater, Film and Television, UCLA* / **Collins Van Nort**, teacher / **Chuy Varela**, radio producer & writer / **Paul Von Blum**, Prof., African American Studies, UCLA* / **Michael Tarif Warren**, attorney / **Rev. George W. Webber**, Prof. of Urban Ministry, Pres. Emeritus, NY Theological Seminary* / **Cornel West**, Prof. of Religion, Princeton Univ.* / **Michael Williams**, Cleveland State Univ.* / **Saul Williams**, artist / **John Wood**, poet, Prof. Emeritus, McNeese Univ.* / **Kriss Worthington**, Berkeley City Councilmember / **Marvin X**, The Univ. of Poetry* / **Al Young**, California Poet Laureate / **David Zeiger**, filmmaker, *Sir! No Sir!* / * for identification purposes only.

Engage! A Committee to Project and Protect the Voice of Bob Avakian

To add your name to this statement and to contribute, including for future publication, contact Engage! at 70A Greenwich Avenue, #434, New York, NY 10011 (Make checks payable to Engage!) For information: 415.902.7936 or info@engagewithbobavakian.org

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tural workers to the Midwest. West, a former golf course developer from Michigan, invented the software himself. He hopes one day to add radio-frequency identification chips to workers' passports to monitor them in real time.

"If a worker gets off the bus to go to the bathroom, the employer will know," he tells me proudly.

Mexican law prohibits recruiters from charging workers for their services, but apart from the efforts of state officials like Ocádiz, the government doesn't do much to enforce the rule. And in an example of the difficulties of crafting transnational labor policy, the US State Department has no position on the law.

"They just tell us not to exaggerate," says Omar Santos, manager of North American Labor, a Monterrey recruitment firm. "Don't let your costs vary too much from the service you provide."

In the absence of government action, one union stepped into the breach. The Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), a small, scrappy outfit, represents about 6,000 Mexican guest workers in North Carolina's tobacco and cucumber fields. In 2005 the group won a court ruling prohibiting farmers in the state's main growers' association, and their agents, from charging workers for visas or transportation.

In the wake of Hurricanes Rita and Katrina, the Gulf Coast has become a test case for the widespread use of foreign temporary labor.

At the union's Monterrey office I meet Santiago Cruz, a young Oaxacan with a ready smile who picked tomatoes and chilies on Ohio farms before becoming an organizer. Cruz and other FLOC staff spend hours talking to workers about their rights in the park outside the consulate, where visa seekers begin lining up at dawn and vendors ply the crowd with snow cones and fliers for cheap hotels. Originally opened to assist the union's members, their office was soon flooded with calls from nonmembers looking for a guide through the visa application labyrinth.

"The recruiters don't respect seniority," says Cruz. "If I've been working somewhere five years, and Juan comes in and it's his first season, they tell Juan, give me $2,000—I'll send you instead."

Because recruiters have workers' addresses and information about their family members, Cruz says, even some unionized workers are afraid to complain. "The recruiters from North Carolina are more careful now," he says. "They know someone is watching them. But if the workers don't report [a problem], there is nothing we can do."

Back at the LLS office, Ana Maria Méndez is happily clutching her brand-new visa, preparing to board a bus to Missouri. She studies the letters on the white card carefully, as if trying to memorize every detail, then climbs the bus steps, the only woman in a group of dozens of men. Laden with its human cargo, the bus pulls away from the curb and rolls off into the night.

Like Méndez, Fernando Rivera had high hopes for his tenure as a guest worker. The 24-year-old law student from Mexico wanted to help purchase an $11,000 operation for his mother, who has liver cancer. When a friend told him he could earn $10 an hour slinging tacos at a restaurant in Louisiana, he jumped at the chance. But when Rivera arrived last October in Westlake, a two-street hamlet several hours west of New Orleans, he discovered that his employer was not a restaurant but a labor contractor named Matt Redd. Redd housed more than 100 workers in rat-infested apartments with eight people sharing a single bathroom, according to Rivera and other workers, confiscating their passports and hiring them out to businesses in the area. He paid Rivera only $6.50 an hour, Rivera says, and when the paychecks arrived, there were often hours missing.

"Matt Redd would sell us to the highest bidder," Rivera says. "The money passed through his hands and afterward there was never very much left." The only Latinos in a town of about 5,000, Rivera and his co-workers say they often endured racist slurs and were stopped several times by police demanding identification. When Rivera asked Redd to return his passport so he could prove his identity, Rivera says, Redd refused and threatened to call immigration.

"It was hell there, but there was nothing else to do but bear it," Rivera says.

Redd admits to taking away the passports but says he was unaware it was illegal. "When we go through this process and pay to get people here, with the attorney's fees and transportation fees, it was some collateral that we had to make sure they stayed and worked for us," he says.

He says any discrepancies in paychecks were mistakes that were soon corrected, and chalks up Rivera's other charges to jealousy of other workers. He believes he is providing an important service to Lake Charles County, which he says had a labor shortage even before Hurricane Rita. "The employers here, they're not getting cheap labor by any stretch of imagination, by the time we pay these people's workers' compensation and taxes," he says. "What they have is someone that shows up. They win, their customers win and the workers certainly win."

With thousands of new guest workers pouring into the Gulf Coast in the wake of Rita and Katrina, such conflicts have multiplied as the region has become a test case for the use of foreign temporary labor. If Congress passes an expanded guest-worker program, some labor experts believe, the patterns established here may spread to other states. Some already have. They include the rise of labor contractors like Redd—who import workers not for a specific job but to hire them out to other companies—and labor camps where employers exercise almost total control over workers' daily lives.

Those workers come not only from Mexico but from countries around the globe. Three-quarters of guest workers nationwide are Mexican, but in a process similar to factory outsourcing, employers skip nimbly from country to country in search of workers with high skills and low salary requirements. At one Louisiana shipyard, Mexican welders on H-2 visas share cramped FEMA trailers with guest workers from Honduras and Romania. In the past five years, while the total number of H-2 workers grew by about two-thirds, the number from Asia more than tripled.

Such workers often risk everything in lengthy and uncertain journeys. P. Subramanian*, a pipefitter from southern India,

* The asterisk indicates a pseudonym.

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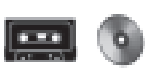

About Your Professor

Dr. Timothy Spurgin is the Bonnie Glidden Buchanan Professor of English Literature at Lawrence University. He has received several awards and honors including the Freshman Studies Teaching Prize, the Outstanding Young Teacher Award, and three Babcock Awards from the students of Lawrence University.

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worked for thirty years on oil rigs in the Middle East before deciding to take his chances in the United States to better support his eighteen family members. He took out high-interest loans to pay $20,000 in recruitment and travel costs for a job with Signal International, a marine and fabrication company with facilities in Texas and Mississippi. But Subramanian arrived in the country at precisely the wrong moment: Signal was locked in a high-profile labor dispute with a group of Indian welders, also guest workers. The workers had protested after the company cut their wages by a third and threatened to fire some, saying they were inexperienced. After one welder attempted suicide, Signal apparently decided it had had enough. So, Subramanian says, the company told him no new Indian workers were needed.

I meet Subramanian in New Orleans, where he is desperately trying to find work despite having no Social Security card, no transportation and only a few months left on his visa. He wears borrowed clothes, thick glasses and a stunned expression, and he carries a binder filled with certificates of merit from companies in Bahrain, Holland and Dubai.

"The companies can send us back, but they won't pay our $20,000," he says. If he can't pay his debt, his creditors in India might go after his family, he adds, drawing his finger across his throat. "It's the very worst condition in life. I cannot go back to India and I cannot stay legally. I feel like a street beggar."

Like Subramanian, a growing number of guest workers are filling skilled blue-collar jobs traditionally held by native-born workers. In 2006 the Labor Department certified requests for temporary steelworkers, electricians, automobile detailers and bus drivers. Signal declined to comment on its hiring of H-2 workers, but Greg Kenefick, a spokesperson for the AFL-CIO Metal Trades Department, said American welders and pipefitters have become scarce on the Gulf Coast because of the lack of schools and affordable housing. Still, he says the council is concerned that companies have sought to fill the demand with "the cheapest wage possible." "The exploitation factor is obvious," he says. "They have a captive workforce, and [that] is the worst competition for union labor."

In order to hire guest workers, an employer must prove that there is a shortage of domestic workers. In agriculture, farmers and unions agree that American workers often prefer low-wage jobs in service and construction to grueling field work. Yet labor experts say employers also deliberately use the program to avoid paying market wages. "To low-wage seasonal industries, a shortage of labor is a lack of surplus labor," says David Griffith, an anthropologist who has studied guest-worker programs for thirty years. "They like a surplus because it keeps wages down." Jill Foutz, a manager at an Ohio landscaping company, is clear about why her business uses H-2 workers: "They're hardworking, they're dependable and they will work for less."

The Labor Department requires employers to document their efforts to recruit US workers, but department records reveal the lengths to which some employers go to deter them from applying. Farm labor contractors have ignored calls from US applicants or asked them to provide résumés—an unusual request in agriculture. And recruiting agencies sometimes help their clients find ways to sidestep the regulations. "We understand that you do not want to hire local workers," reads the website for Head Honchos, a Texas-based recruiting firm. "Head Honchos can instruct you on what to say during interviews and how to handle any questions that you might have regarding this step."

Not every guest worker has a bad experience. Every year, Alex González and his wife pack up their belongings and their two chihuahuas and travel from Mexico City to St. Louis, where they own a car and rent a two-bedroom house. There they spend eight months working side by side for the same landscaping company. González has learned English and says the $12 an hour he earns there has helped him afford a new house in Mexico and even a few luxuries like designer eyeglasses. "My life is worth too much to risk it in the desert," he says. "When you go legally you have more opportunities."

The typical guest-worker saga is not a nightmare or a success story but a soft, slow bleed of resources from worker to employer.

Some unions and immigrants' rights groups point to stories like González's as evidence that a reformed guest-worker program could ease pressures on migrants. The Coalition for Comprehensive Immigration Reform, which includes community groups and unions like the Service Employees International Union, has joined employers in supporting a revamped H-2 program that would allow workers to choose their jobs and eventually attain permanent residency.

Having a temporary-worker visa "means you can cross the border without spending four days in the desert," says Harley Shaiken, a labor expert at the University of California, Berkeley. "If you run a stop sign, you don't risk being deported. It's a huge difference. But I suspect you're paying for that with tougher conditions and less mobility."

The typical guest-worker saga is probably not a nightmare like Rivera's or a success story like González's but a soft, slow bleed of resources from worker to employer. It begins with the worker paying visa and travel costs and continues through petty paycheck deductions for services like phone calls and van rides and labor law violations like the ones suffered by Miguel Angel Gómez, a landscape worker in Ohio. Gómez injured his chest at work and racked up $1,000 in hospital bills. Though the work offer he signed in Mexico said he would be covered by workers' compensation—required by US law—his employer refused to honor it because it was in Spanish. So Gómez struggles to pay a little of the bill each month, even as his work hours have fallen to twenty per week, another breach of his contract. "I could try to find another boss," he says. "But I would waste years going through all the paperwork. I just want to keep earning."

Yet Gómez is lucky in one respect: He came to the United States under a portion of the guest-worker program known as H-2A, which covers farmworkers and a few landscapers. On paper at least, H-2A workers enjoy benefits beyond the wildest dreams of most undocumented workers. Farmers must provide free food, housing, tools and transportation. To encourage growers to hire domestic workers, the government requires them to pay visa holders a premium known as the "adverse effect wage rate," which can reach $10 per hour in some states. Like low-income

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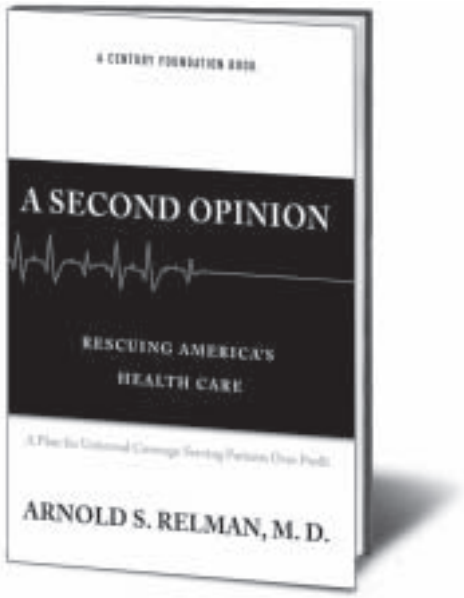

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Hardcover; $24.00
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Americans, they are entitled by law to free legal representation.

By contrast, two-thirds of guest workers are hired under another subsection, H-2B, created in the small-government Reagan years to fill non-agricultural jobs. H-2B workers exist in a regulatory vacuum with few rights and no access to legal services. Program regulations state only that workers must be paid the prevailing wage in their industry, and the Labor Department claims it lacks authority to enforce even that. While the department doesn't keep statistics on how many H-2B employers violate labor laws, public-interest lawyers point to several cases where companies were permitted to continue importing workers for years despite a pattern of abuse.

In a decades-long dispute that has become a symbol of the program's shortcomings, the Labor Department and state agencies repeatedly fined labor contractor Evergreen Forestry Services for housing Central American workers in tents during the winter, denying them toilets and drinking water, and paying them less than the minimum wage. Yet even while one agency within the department was writing reports identifying a "woeful history" of labor law violations at Evergreen, another unit, the Employment Training Administration, was certifying the company to hire more and more guest workers. Labor lawyers and even state regulators begged the agency to deny the company's petitions, to no avail. Their fears were confirmed in 2002, when fourteen Evergreen workers died after the van speeding them to their job thinning pine trees in the Maine woods plummeted off a bridge. The department fined Evergreen $17,000 but continued to approve its petitions for guest workers as recently as 2006.

Labor Department spokesperson Matthew Faraci did not respond to specific questions about Evergreen but said that investigations in "low-wage, high-violation industries" were a department priority. He noted that the department's Wage and Hour division has pursued claims against H-2B employers under the Fair Labor Standards Act, in one case recovering $36,000 in back wages. But both worker advocates and labor contractors say such investigations are rare, and the agency has no investigators specifically assigned to monitor conditions for guest workers.

"The Department of Labor does basically nothing," says Jeff West of LLS. "It's up to us," he says, to insure workers are not mistreated. The effectiveness of this voluntary system depends on the whims of contractors. LLS managers—who charge workers a relatively low $165 fee—know many recruits by name and say they view their work as a ministry. Before boarding a bus to the United States, each LLS worker is offered a shrink-wrapped copy of the New Testament and a company flier. "God, Country, Work, and Family: LLS Shares Your Values," it reads, and encourages workers to call an 800 number with any problems.

Other recruitment agencies can be less forgiving. When H-2B workers at New Orleans luxury hotel chain Decatur Hotels spoke out against low wages and decrepit housing last year, the agent who processed their visas immediately visited the hotels, the workers say—but not to support them. "She said we should feel lucky to be here, that some people would give their lives to be here," says Maria Ramos*, one of the workers who met with the agent, Virginia Pickering of Accent Personnel Services. "It was very hard to hear." (Pickering declined to be interviewed for this story.) Thus, workers are often inhibited from speaking out. Most

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of those interviewed for this article did not want their names published for fear of retaliation. A 1997 report by the US General Accounting Office found that the H-2A program's requirements were difficult to enforce because guest workers "are unlikely to complain about worker protection violations…because they fear that they will lose their jobs or will not be accepted…for future employment."

Fernando Rivera and his co-workers in Westlake are an exception. Within months of arriving in Louisiana, they began meeting with organizers from the New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice. Dozens of workers just off their shifts would pack into an apartment in the wee hours, plotting how to get Redd to return their passports and visas. Rivera was especially motivated: His mother's operation was approaching, and as the only family member with the same blood type, he wanted to be in Mexico in case she needed a transfusion.

In February the workers issued a joint press release with African-American Katrina survivors, saying they planned to conduct a citizens' arrest of a local "slaveholder." With the police and press looking on, the two groups marched to Redd's office and demanded the release of the workers' documents.

They got the passports, but Redd escaped, and he continues to employ H-2 workers. Rivera was fired and returned to Mexico; in his four months as a guest worker he had earned about $3,000.

The Westlake protest was a rare show of solidarity between two communities often pitted against each other in the immigration debate. "Guest workers are taking our jobs," says Curtis Muhammad, a former SNCC organizer who helped lead the protest, as we sit on the porch of his rickety duplex in flood-damaged Tremé, one of the country's oldest black neighborhoods. "But we're not going to fight them about jobs. Our struggle is to unite so that we're not hurt by the process."

I ask him how he justifies comparing guest work to slavery. "Do you know the story of the Middle Passage?" he asks. "In slavery, you send a slave catcher, they go to the chiefs and make a deal. They say, We're going to take your people to heaven, and they show them a few pretty things from heaven. You load them onto the ships and only when they get out to sea do they know they're slaves. You take them to one owner, and if they leave they're a runaway. Well, with guest workers…" He trails off, his meaning clear.

As dusk falls in Lockport, Louisiana, a few dozen men gather around plastic banquet tables in a nondescript warehouse, next to a yard strewn with rusty tools and the hollow hulls of half-assembled boats. The men, guest workers employed by a local shipbuilder, are complaining about their jobs to organizers from the newly formed Alliance of Guestworkers for Dignity. They are tired, they say, of paying close to $400 per month to live "like chickens" in windowless dormitories and eat spoiled food. They earn only $8 per hour, a far cry from the $21.50 that unionized Americans at a nearby shipyard take home. "We keep on hoping there will be some justice," says Enrique Ceja, a welder from Veracruz. "This was our American dream, but we were fooled from the moment we were recruited."

Organizer Daniel Castellanos listens patiently. To get here, he slipped past a sheriff's deputy at the gate—there to enforce a strict

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no-visitors policy—as he has many times at labor camps like this one. A former guest worker from Peru, Castellanos helped found the Alliance last year after he and several co-workers sued Decatur Hotels, accusing the company of luring them to New Orleans with false promises and failing to reimburse them for up to $5,000 in travel costs. The group now claims 500 members. In May it hosted a regional summit where visa holders from six countries drafted a statement urging that their voices be heard in any discussions about a new guest-worker plan.

"Bush says the guest-worker program is going well, but it's not going well for us," Castellanos tells the workers now, to nods from the crowd. "You come here supposedly with the same rights as an American worker. But they give you the most dangerous jobs, and they pay you less."

Yet even as these workers begin to take action, the ground is shifting under their feet. The Senate is currently debating legislation, long sought by George W. Bush, that would add up to 200,000 more guest workers to the rolls each year. Modeled on the H-2B visa program, the Senate plan contains no mention of reimbursement for housing, travel or recruitment costs, and no opportunity for guest workers to become permanent residents. Guest workers could change jobs, but only to companies already certified to take part in the program.

The bill would ban employers with a history of serious labor law violations from hiring guest workers and increase the ranks of Labor Department investigators. But guest workers and their advocates say these protections do not go far enough. In a scathing new report on the H-2 program, the Southern Poverty Law Center argues that a new guest-worker visa should be completely portable, with employers paying all costs of recruitment.

The Nuevo Leon state government offered in 2005 to match Mexican workers with United States companies at no charge to the workers. About 300 Mexicans have found jobs through the initiative. But any Mexican government effort will have to work to escape the shadow of the infamous bracero program, a joint US-Mexico venture that brought more than 4.5 million farm laborers across the border during and after World War II. In the program, which closed down in 1964 amid public outcry over poor working conditions, both governments cooperated to deduct 10 percent from all the braceros' paychecks, supposedly to establish a retirement fund. But the money disappeared deep within the Mexican banking system, and most braceros never saw a dime.

Even if a system with stiffer worker protections is developed, employers accustomed to cheap unregulated labor might not use it. Research by the Arizona-based think tank ThinkAZ shows that in states with large undocumented populations, businesses avoid hiring H-2 workers, preferring the flexibility of an illegal workforce. Farmer participation in the H-2A program, with its housing requirements and wage guarantees, has remained almost flat in recent years. Meanwhile, the more laissez-faire H-2B system has flourished, with the government adjusting the cap several times to cope with skyrocketing employer demand.

"The tendency has been for the H-2 program…to devolve into a system that approximates the exploitative, illegal, underground labor market it was (in part) designed to replace," writes Griffith, the anthropologist, in his 2006 book *American Guestworkers.* "Indeed, there is some evidence that without this downward trend in conditions…legal guestworkers become less attractive to U.S. employers."

Whatever the outcome of the current Congressional debate, it's clear that the stakes are high, both for guest workers and for those who profit from the current system. Just two weeks after I left Monterrey, the Farm Labor Organizing Committee's Santiago Cruz was found beaten to death in a pool of blood in the union's office. While the Mexican police investigate his murder, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has ordered protection for the union's remaining staff members in Mexico. Union leaders are convinced Cruz was killed for organizing guest workers

"There's a whole ring of opposition to us, from recruiters to growers to all the interests that take advantage of a low-wage workforce," union president Baldemar Velásquez tells me a few days after the killing. "We're cutting into their corrupt business, and they don't like it." ■

EXCHANGE
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)
their representatives, asking them to take action on this issue, and support Gomory's ideas for balanced trade and tax incentives to keep American industry and wages *in America.*

LARRY LAWRENCE

GREIDER REPLIES

Washington, DC

■ Many readers' reactions to my article reflect a deep pessimism toward globalization. The process seems too overwhelming to challenge and change. Resignation may be understandable, but passivity is not a moral option. As earlier eras of industrial globalization demonstrated, the process ends badly for all—social upheaval, economic collapse, even war—if the fundamental flaws and injustices are never corrected.

The objections to defending Americans from loss when the rest of the world is so poor sound superficially progressive, but it actually repeats a fallacy common to previous industrial revolutions. In the name of economic advancement, many were sacrificed—mainly working people and the poor—while the new wealth flowed to a fortunate few. Workers, rich and poor, are not on opposite sides. They are all victims of the same perverse theology.

Norman Girvan correctly points out that the actions of the United States to discipline its multinationals cannot succeed without international cooperation. True enough, but the hope is that once the United States abandons its failed free-trade ideology, that will open the way to the international negotiations on social and economic reforms Girvan envisions.

Finally, Professor Boudreaux demonstrates how economic statistics can be used to sustain unreality. China and India have vast populations that dwarf the United States', so citing "per capita" comparisons is meaningless. China's developing economy actually consists of only about 300 million people within its 1.3 billion—mainly in the coastal regions, where the great transformation is under way. Perhaps the professor can explain how his capital-poor China manages to run a trade surplus every year with the United States in "advanced technology products" or why this surplus has tripled in the last five years.

WILLIAM GREIDER

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

Chinese Mirrors

RICK PERLSTEIN

In 1967, when *Time* magazine managed to get an Australian reporter by the name of John Cantwell into mainland China, his dispatch read like what a report from North Korea—or from another planet—would look like today. "Red Guards march around in vigilante groups, stern-faced and forbidding.... I saw them surround and berate an old man who dared look at an anti-Mao poster.... Hostile crowds sometimes surrounded me, and people shouted: 'What are you doing here, white devil?'" A delicate beauty from the Chinese travel service informed him, "Chairman Mao has taught us that we must crush the American aggressors. We must kill, crush, destroy all imperialist monsters." "Practically no one smiles," Cantwell wrote. Good thing, readers might have concluded, we were fighting a war in Vietnam to contain these lunatics.

A scant forty-two months later, America was introduced to a China where everyone smiled. American Ping-Pong players, invited on a surprise visit in April 1971, received hospitality so overwhelming a team member started crying. One player, Tim Boggan, reporting back in an article for the *New York Times*, affectionately described a "large playground where perhaps 200 children of all ages were playing soccer, basketball, and other sports," the kind of camaraderie he said he'd like to see more of in the United States. Less than a year after that, on Richard Nixon's historic visit, the nation saw this busy, happy, industrious people for themselves on TV: families picnicking at the Ming Tombs; a chef at the Peking Hotel transforming a turnip into a chrysanthemum for the First Lady; Pat Nixon, fetching in a white lab coat, cheered by the adorable moppets at Peking Children's Hospital.

Study the tourist snaps on Flickr.com from the Ming Tombs, the Great Wall, all the stops on the Nixons' itinerary: America's China is now the place where everyone smiles. One typical stop for upper-middle-class tourists on tightly scripted itineraries even recalls Tim Boggan at the playground and Mrs. Nixon at the children's hospital: the Shanghai Children's Palace, a lovely old mansion where adorable children dance ballet, play accordions, learn computer programming, practice Chinese opera. An affluent American couple I talked with upon their return from China rhapsodized about it, gushing that every child in this nation of 1.3 billion—this they had been given to understand by their guide—is provided such opportunities free. It seemed, I responded, better than anything a typical American child can expect. "A lot better," the wife responded. I pressed; she allowed some skepticism to creep into her voice: "It's possible they made it look better than it was." No such skepticism, though, when the subject turned to their tour of the site of the Three Gorges Dam, which soon will cause the Yangtze River reservoir to rise to 175 meters over sea level. "It's going to solve a lot of their problems," the husband gushed, noting the high-rises being built to house the million exiles who will be displaced, who now live in "shacks like you wouldn't believe." "They're really on the cusp of an economic revolution."

This man, retired after many decades building a successful business in the Midwest, is a car nut who long ago became dismayed by, then resigned to, the slow decline of American industrial dominance. He didn't see any American cars on China's newly teeming roads; China, he pointed

BOOKS DISCUSSED IN THIS ESSAY

THE CHINA FANTASY: How Our Leaders Explain Away Chinese Repression.
By James Mann.
Penguin. 127 pp. $19.95.

NIXON AND MAO: The Week That Changed the World.
By Margaret MacMillan.
Random House. 402 pp. $27.95.

WASHINGTON'S CHINA: The National Security World, the Cold War, and the Origins of Globalism.
By James Peck.
Massachusetts. 333 pp. $24.95.

Rick Perlstein is the author of Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus. *He is currently writing a book about Richard Nixon.*

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out, is "going to start exporting cars to the US in the next few years." He couldn't imagine America building a Three Gorges Dam. That was for the Chinas of the world—civilizations of destiny.

This capitalist sounded like the kind of pilgrim who used to visit Soviet steel mills, or cut sugar cane beside Cuban peasants, and returned singing panegyrics to a new, better world being born.

Mission accomplished, you could imagine China's commissars murmuring. China still has commissars, it's easy to forget; it is still run, James Mann reminds us in his striking little hand grenade of a book *The China Fantasy*, "by a Communist Party governed, in hierarchical ascending circles, by a Central Committee, a Politburo, and a Standing Committee of the Politburo." They still do what commissars do. That's the point of Mann's book.

My tourist retirees visited Tiananmen Square. Good American innocents abroad, they asked their guide about the event that made it familiar to them. "He wouldn't answer questions. He didn't want to talk about it." Few American visitors come back better informed than before they arrived about the hundreds (thousands? we will never know) massacred in the democracy demonstrations of 1989; or the tens of thousands of political prisoners in Chinese jails at any given time (some for the "crime," officially stricken from the books, of "counterrevolution"); or the dozens of criminals killed every day by the state (by one count there were 12,000 executions in China in 2005); or the hundreds of antigovernment protests in rural China. Or, say, about the retired military doctor Jiang Yanyong, who in 2003 became a national hero and international symbol of China's strides toward democracy for publicizing the SARS epidemic and who, a year later, was thrown in jail for criticizing the Tiananmen massacre.

Those who return no better informed about this record than when they arrived include, it would appear, tourists who should know better. Nicholas Kristof dishonored the fifteenth anniversary of the massacre in 2004, Mann points out, with a column titled "The Tiananmen Victory." The democracy activists had won: "After the Chinese could watch Eddie Murphy, wear tight pink dresses and struggle over what to order at Starbucks, the revolution was finished. No middle class is content with more choices of coffees than of candidates on a ballot."

There haven't been any multiparty ballots for China's middle class to mark yet. And there won't be, Mann argues in an elegant formulation: The urban middle class is "a tiny proportion of the country's overall population," and in any election candidates representing their interests would be swamped by those of the peasantry; thus it is just as easy, or easier, to imagine them as "a driving force in *opposition* to democracy."

That's not what you used to hear from Bill Clinton. He claimed that with the rise of market economics, and the exploding middle class these reforms have wrought, the road to Chinese democracy was smooth: "Economic freedom creates habits of liberty," he said in 1997. "And habits of liberty create expectations of democracy.... Trade freely with China, and time is on our side."

DOUG CHAYKA

Nixon in China

No, wait. That was George W. Bush, in his November 1999 opening foreign policy address. *This* one is from William J. Clinton: Trade with China, he told President Jiang Zemin, will "increase the spirit of liberty over time.... I just think it's inevitable, just as inevitably the Berlin wall fell."

Clinton's NSC head, Sandy Berger, said in 2000 that "there is an unstoppable momentum" toward democracy in China.

No, wait. That was Tony Blair in 2005. Berger said, "Just as NAFTA membership eroded the economic base of one-party rule in Mexico, WTO membership...can help do the same in China."

China has become rather like Israel: No matter the party, no matter the leader, certain de rigueur formulas must be uttered. Mann strips the hustle bare: "Every single American president since Nixon has, in one way or another, either ignored or quietly given up on the issue of Chinese democracy." Since this abandonment has been hemmed around by strenuous presidential representations that democracy is precisely what American policy toward China is all about, this has required some fancy ideological footwork. Mann lays out the steps. He says that the apostle of human rights, President Carter, made the second breakthrough, after Nixon's: He came up with the rationalization that whatever the abuses evident in the 1970s, the situation was much better than it had been during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s. Ronald Reagan, President during Deng Xiaoping's first moves toward market liberalization, was able via that patented Reagan magic to explain away China's Leninist state with a verbal wave of the hand: He referred to the People's Republic as "so-called Communist China." "*Mr. Deng, keep up this wall!*"

The first President Bush was presented with an irritant: that inconvenient 1989 massacre, the same year citizens staged democracy demonstrations in East Germany, where, on the orders of a weak and intimidated Kremlin, the army stepped aside. Incredibly, this became the excuse to *downplay* Tiananmen: The cold war was over. What was the point of undue hostility? Bush 41 promptly announced a "comprehensive policy of engagement," making it the United States' priority to restore the $2 billion in interest-free loans the World Bank had withheld from China in punishment. It was Clinton who "managed to turn black into white and white into black—to persuade Americans that it was somehow politically progressive and intellectually sophisticated to accept Chinese repression and uncouth or unenlightened to attempt to combat it." He revoked his own executive order on trade sanctions, written to honor his campaign promise of "an America that will not coddle dictators, from Baghdad to Beijing." "Why bother to protest a crackdown or urge China to allow political opposition," Mann archly concludes, "if you know that democracy's coming anyway by the inexorable laws of history?"

James Mann is now best known as the author of *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (2004), but he was also the *Los Angeles Times*'s Beijing bureau chief from 1984 to 1987, and he is the author of *Beijing Jeep: A Case Study of Western Business in China* (1989), an account of an early attempt to establish a joint manufacturing deal in China, and *About Face: A History of America's Curious Relationship With China, From Nixon to Clinton* (2000). He's a China watcher. More crucially, he's a China-watcher watcher. Watching the China watchers, we watch ourselves.

America's image of China changes with whiplash speed. What never changes is the sort of people propounding the images: the Kristofs, the Clintons, the Sandy Bergers;

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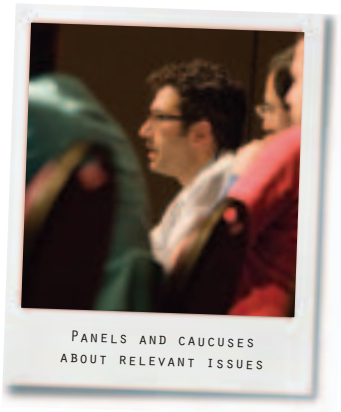

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before them, the Alsops, the Trumans, the Dulleses; and back behind them, men whose names are unfamiliar to us but whose sociological and psychological profiles are the same—mandarins of American power, unshakable in their confidence that the natural and transparent truth about China just happens to coincide with America's interests at any given time and to the well-being of the about-to-be-uplifted Chinese masses.

Billionaire-by-marriage Thomas Friedman, naturally, makes an early appearance in *The China Fantasy*. "China's going to have a free press," he wrote in *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, arguing from dialectical inevitability: "Globalization will drive it." Half right: China now has an active financial press. Newspapers that publish freely on politics, however, are shut down—at which point, jabs Mann, the Friedmans of the world seem "to vanish from public view." Same thing, he says, with "initiatives for rule of law": They "have made some progress when it comes to business disputes." Regarding other disputes, however, it's commissars all the way down. "The result could well be a Chinese legal system that offers special protection for foreign investors but not ordinary Chinese individuals."

What a bastard this James Mann is. The Carter Center in Atlanta has praised China's system of village elections; he says it's been suckered. "You can run for office in a single village on your own without any organizational support by going door-to-door, because everybody knows everybody else. However, once you try to have an election that covers three villages, you need an organization"—a political party, which is illegal. "In fact, one might even say that allowing village elections helps to strengthen the rule of the Chinese Communist Party, by giving outsiders the appearance that democracy is spreading across China when in fact the party remains as much in political control as it was before."

What easy marks these American mandarins are. China knows it can count on them to swat down critics via a standard lexicon of abuse: They are "China bashers" possessed of a "cold war mentality." The China watchers are also absurdly deferential: "If we reflexively treat the Chinese as a threat, we will answer our own question: They will become a threat," says *Newsweek* contributing editor Robert Samuelson. "If you treat China as an enemy," says Harvard China hand Joseph Nye, "it will become an enemy."

Economists, those not busy lionizing America's favorite new source of dirt-cheap labor, might recognize this as a perverse set of incentives that *hastens* undesirable outcomes. "Pick a dictator anywhere on the globe," Mann writes, and you'll find Chinese backing. The Chinese gave Robert Mugabe an honorary degree—and "new surveillance equipment to crack down on Internet traffic and block dissident radio signals." The military regime in Burma has enjoyed consistent backing, as have Uzbek President Islam Karimov (the "body boiler"), the genocidal government of Sudan, even the coup against Mikhail Gorbachev in 1991. Don't raise a fuss: "*Any tension between America and China is inherently bad,*" Mann paraphrases the China watchers, "*and is the responsibility of the United States.* However, if the confrontation involves intellectual property rights or other U.S. commercial interests, then it is China's fault and is a legitimate issue that must be addressed immediately."

Though it may be that they are not suckers at all: They enjoy a handsome quid pro quo. First Kissinger, then Brent Scowcroft, Madeleine Albright, William Cohen and Sandy Berger—all have set up lucrative China consultancies. So have "ordinary working-level civil servants." Mann singles out Kenneth Lieberthal of the University of Michigan, a former Clinton NSC aide who pontificates wisely against China bashers ("Those who raise alarms focus too much on the problems of success and too little on the problems of failure" is a recent extrusion) without disclosing his employ at Sandy Berger's consulting firm.

Oceania has not always been at peace with East Asia. Back when we were at war, the inevitabilities were reversed. The Chinese, President Eisenhower wrote in his diary in 1955, were "completely reckless, arrogant…completely indifferent as to human losses." "We are going to have to fight the Chinese anyway in 2, 3, 5, or 10 years," advised Kennedy hand Chester Bowles six years later, "and it is just a question of where, when and how."

This China where no one smiled was born in 1949, when the Communist revolutionaries led by Mao Zedong prevailed in the country's civil war over the forces of Chiang Kai-shek, who exiled themselves to the island of Taiwan. The panic of the cold war "Wise Men" we lionize today as the apogee of sound strategic wisdom—the enemies of the McCarthyite lunatics—was something to behold. "When a Chinese classical opera company came to Toronto," writes Margaret MacMillan, a Canadian professor and author of *Nixon and Mao: The Week That Changed the World*, "the American authorities announced that any American citizens who bought

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tickets were violating American law."

The problem was not merely that China was Communist. Russia was Communist, but containment doctrine still allowed for *contact* with Moscow. By 1959 the iconic image of Soviet-American relations was Vice President Nixon visiting an American trade fair in Moscow, standing nose to nose with Khrushchev in polite if forceful dialogue over whose system would eventually win. No such "kitchen debate" in China. Instead, the iconic moment was at the 1954 Geneva Conference to settle the Indochinese War and the Korean War. Premier Zhou En-lai politely offered his hand to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. Dulles rudely brushed past him.

The original rationale for this, James Peck demonstrates in his brilliant, forceful and awesomely researched study *Washington's China: The National Security World, the Cold War, and the Origins of Globalism*, was that Mao's government was, as Dean Rusk put it in 1951, "a colonial Russian government. It is not the Government of China. It does not pass the first test. It is not Chinese." To believe it, our Wise Men convinced themselves that these 500 million souls, and the party to which they submitted, had been lobotomized of China's very national character.

The defining political experience of the People's Republic's founders was the "century of humiliation," which stretched from the latter days of the Qing dynasty in the mid-1800s to the 1949 revolution. Zhou En-lai, child of a colonized mandarin class in its death throes, would never forget the shame of being sent, in 1907, to sell the family treasures to pawnbrokers; when a teacher "asked his students why they were studying," MacMillan relates, Zhou replied, "So that China can rise up." The uprising's turn to Marxism was fascinatingly complex: It was relentlessly future-oriented and neatly compatible with "Confucian values of order and harmony and of disdain for business," Lenin's simultaneous vision of anticolonial nationalism and world-conquering vanguardism and China's own "Middle Kingdom" chauvinism that led it easily to believe that it was the vanguard. But these complexities disappeared with a *poof!* in the reckoning of our Wise Men.

Writes Peck: "American officials never seriously entertained the possibility that Stalin might eventually have to deal with the Chinese communists as a partner or an ally or that China simply could not be dominated." Instead they searched high and low for regime elements that were "more Chi than Commie," as one cable put it. The Taiwan Chinese government, on the other hand—whom we bankrolled—was inherently not just "nationalist" but "free." Even as one diplomat recorded that "any critic is in dire danger of being arrested as a Communist and disappearing.... There is no such thing as a system of justice," a dissident diplomat across the Straight of Taiwan observed, "The most serious allegation of Russian interference I have heard is that they turned over large quantities of Japanese arms and munitions to the Communists when withdrawing from Manchuria."

The intelligence laundering was downright Bushian, and the rest of the world thought us mad. London said the primary appeal of Mao to the peasants was his land reforms, their primary methods were propaganda, inspired popular movements, and personal persuasion." Clement Attlee lectured Truman that "Chinese civilization is very old and it is accustomed to absorbing new things"; Truman was baffled. But then, he was relying on analysis that resembled a John Birch Society newsletter. "To date the Vietnam press and radio have not adopted an anti-American position," a State Department report noted, which suggested "a special dispensation for the Vietnamese government has been arranged in Moscow." The department was apparently unaware that Ho Chi Minh was then sending earnest and ignored

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telegrams to Truman pledging an independent Vietnam as "a fertile field for American capital and enterprise."

In this context the joint North Korean and Chinese invasion of South Korea was greeted as an opportunity: proof of "centrally directed Communist Imperialism," a State Department cable trumpeted. "With the war," Peck says, "the United States could undertake to isolate and thus contain China through a rapid and massive escalation of power in East Asia." Truman sent the Seventh Fleet to patrol the Taiwan Strait, since Taiwan was obviously next. But Eisenhower was recorded worrying at an NSC meeting the next year, "If Red China…should finally get out of North Korea, release our prisoners, and act decently, how in the world could the United States continue to avoid recognizing Communist China?"

Once more much of the rest of the world thought we were nuts. "Viewed through Asiatic eyes," observed one wise head, a midlevel bureaucrat who didn't prevail, "Formosa belongs to China." In the event of war, "we would find…practically all of the Asiatic countries siding with the Chinese Communists and indeed some of the Western European countries." Other countries also pointed out that China's incursion into Korea, while lawless, was better explained by Chinese history and normal sphere-of-influence politics than Moscow puppetry; and Acheson blew his stack: "While musical strains issuing from Peiping are Chinese, [the] organist is Russian." Why didn't the rest of the world *understand*?

We all know how this story turns out: By the late 1960s, China and the Soviet Union were almost at nuclear war. Why couldn't our Wise Men imagine that eventuality? Why were they so *stupid*?

For Peck, their strange rationales followed a logic that helps explain our determinately myopic China watchers today. The explanation is, fundamentally, materialist. Its raw materials are the secret words sent by diplomatic cable and NSC strategic assessments. As George Kennan wrote in 1948: "We have about 50% of the world's wealth but only 6.3% of its population.… Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern for relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity without positive detriment to our national security. To do so, we will have to dispense with all sentimentality and daydreaming.… We need not deceive ourselves that we can afford today the luxury of altruism and world benefaction."

Of course, illusion-stripping smoking guns like this are rare in any archive. But they are rare, Peck stresses, not merely because mandarins have wanted to hide the mercenary foundations of our foreign policy from everyone else. They have also deceived themselves. It's fascinating to see texts meant for no one's eyes but top officials marked by sentimentality and daydreaming, luxuriating in fantasies of altruism and world benefaction. For instance, Kennan in PPS/51 stresses "the heritage and philosophical concepts which are the inner reasons that we are… not only great but good, and therefore a dynamic force in the mind of the world." And the preamble to NSC 5602/1: "The genius, strength and promise of America are founded in the dedication of its people and government to the dignity, equality and freedom of the human being under God. These concepts and our institutions which nourish and maintain them with justice are the bulwark of our free society, and are the basis of the respect and leadership which have been accorded our nation by the peoples of the world."

"Where conviction stops and propaganda starts is all but impossible to sort out in NSC documents of these years," Peck observes. They propagandized themselves, the better to propagandize the world. "The Achesons, McCloys, Lovetts, and Harrimans were anything but moderates," Peck points out. "Their triumph, to themselves and others, was the *claim* [my emphasis] that they actually embodied *the* [his emphasis] national interest for the presidents they served." You see the architects of those ideas *struggling* to make this seem natural and self-evident. Like America's world-shaping elites today, they resembled a "Community of Faith." Their attitude was "fervently visionary."

The vision was of "state power ordering the structures of the global economic order." That was a tricky faith to proselytize, certainly to the rest of the world—"It is of course clear that we could not expect the support of any other major Western nation for a program of economic warfare against China"—but first and foremost to an American populace that tended to isolationism. Explains Peck: "Anticommunism supplied the mobilizing passion and sense of direction that the economic dimension, on its own, could not." So did the notion that, in Beijing, there lived yet more horrifying monsters than in Russia.

Peck has a precise set of claims about the economic story. China had to be isolated to hold together an emerging "multilateral global capitalist system in Asia." In Europe, the crucial geostrategic toehold was West Germany—which could enjoy economic health trading with the free states with which it was contiguous, free from the temptation to make peace with Moscow. Japan could not serve the same role in China: Its prosperity was traditionally built on trade with China. The temptation to form a *modus vivendi* with Mao was natural. So China had to be quarantined as an international pariah to render that temptation moot. What's more, the China that provided a role model to nations that wished to make a go of it outside the American-run international order of "free trade" threatened that entire order.

The materialism is a bit overblown. And Peck admits that the bifurcation between

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In the *Iliad*, there is no natural death—
everything comes about by intent
as if the pulse and very breath
we take were something meant
to be shaped. All that violence
out of somebody's error.
The same clumsy butting against the sense
of things over and over, horrible,
then somehow forgettable. And in the middle of the shield,
in the middle of the day, in the middle of their never-
ending tasks, the women go on yielding
to it, scrubbing the corpse cloths whiter
than ever, digging with their sticks in the dirt,
hauling the water back and forth, over
and over, where it runs forever through the dry ditch.

Susan Stewart

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"peaceful coexistence" with Russians and the almost comically stringent walling off of China (there really were debates over whether an egg laid in Taiwan by a chicken raised in Beijing could be sold in Hong Kong) had other, less rationalist sources. "No matter what differences in culture and tradition, values or language," he quotes Eisenhower writing in his memoirs, "the Russian leaders were human beings, and they wanted to remain alive." He gave a rather different assessment of the Chinese at an NSC meeting: "We are always wrong when we believe that Orientals think logically as we do." Peck even drills down to materialist bedrock to explain the racism: "Such denigration served to sustain and promote key American global and regional Asian strategic objectives; it was never simply a misperception that distorted American strategy."

But history works in mysterious ways. Stripping Japan of its traditional trading relationship, our Wise Men balanced this with extraordinary concessions: They were allowed, as nowhere else, to pursue protectionist policies, given special access to US patents and licenses. "Some Washington officials—and none more caustically than Dulles—argued that the Japanese could not produce goods in enough quantity to be of interest to the United States."

By the turn of the 1970s, Japan's exports to the rest of the world had more than quadrupled; in the same decade America's increased by a mere two-thirds. Japan's trade with the United States doubled from 1965 to 1967 alone. And, of course, the original cold war hawk, Richard Nixon, cobbled together the diplomatic hinge by which China's role in the survival of the global capitalist order swung around exactly 180 degrees, our commitment to Taiwan a matter of relative indifference. China? Isn't that where everyone smiles?

You could venture a materialist explanation for all this, too, a tale of delicious irony: Japan exploits the concessions America made to contain China by provisioning America's war in Vietnam, which was supposed to contain China (this despite the historic enmity between Vietnam and China); and that very economic vulnerability vis-à-vis a rising Japan explains why capitalism brought forth the unlikely peacemaker—Richard Nixon. But you'd get badly bogged down trying to tell it: The personalities get in the way of the dialectic.

People were always trying to brief Henry Kissinger about Japan. He would only get bored. It is the most fascinating revelation in *Nixon and Mao*, an otherwise serviceable if uninspired retelling of the historic February 1972 China trip: Kissinger and Nixon couldn't have cared less about commerce. The National Security Adviser dismissed Japanese officials as "Sony salesmen." In the tortured negotiations over the Shanghai Communiqué, which spelled out the new understanding between China and the United States—MacMillan has a whole chapter on it—"The wording on trade and exchanges was...relatively easy to settle." Whispered Kissinger, in heavy Germanic brogue: "We both know that basically they don't mean anything.... The maximum amount of bilateral trade possible between us, even if we make great efforts, is infinitesimal in terms of our total economy."

Nixon thought his visit was about balancing cold war superpowers China and the USSR. Its meaning turned out to be Wal-Martism.

In Nixon's own conception, the China trip was almost exclusively an intervention in the balance of forces between the Soviet Union and China, an attempt to exploit tensions between the two superpowers to settle the Vietnam War. The meaning turned out to be Wal-Martism. China does more business with the Arkansas retailer than it does with Canada, Russia or Australia. It evolved, too, into Mann's China fantasy: that engagement would lead to democracy—a matter of indifference to Nixon and Kissinger.

MacMillan provides few clues as to how we got from there to here; *Nixon and Mao* packs about as much analytic punch as a high school social studies textbook. Mann doesn't proffer many either. His book is too short for that—about the size a Wall Street hedge fund manager could digest in a single day's rail commute from Westchester County. It's no longer than it needs to be, for his subject is simple: the psychology of American elites, which in its will to self-flattery and -propagandization doesn't change much at all.

Which, come to think of it, is why our hedge fund manager wouldn't bother his beautiful mind with a book like Mann's *China Fantasy*. It flatters no one. I can easily see him reading *Nixon and Mao* on a business flight to Beijing. Its narrative is aggressively benign, starting with our thirty-seventh President striding out onto the White House south lawn on February 17, 1972, for the first leg of his journey. He quoted the words of the Apollo 11 astronauts: "We came in peace for all mankind." Says MacMillan: "It was classic Nixon, that mixture of pragmatism and grandiloquence."

Yes, well: Cattle ranchers have a word for that mixture, too. You're better off not stepping in it.

Ask the people of East Pakistan, which would later be known as Bangladesh. One of Christopher Hitchens's last sound contributions to the republic of letters was his account, in his book on Kissinger, of Nixon's back channel to the Chinese leadership through Pakistan's military dictator Yahya Khan. MacMillan finds in those dealings admirable pragmatism: "If every message back and forth, each step in the negotiations to arrange Kissinger's secret visit and then Nixon's, had been conducted publicly, the Americans would have found themselves with a very public controversy." Actually it was Machiavellian quid pro quo of a scale that might have made even Mao blush. East Pakistan had just had its first free election in a decade. The wrong man won and, in March 1971, Yahya sent troops to put down what he called an insurrection. The American consulate sent Washington a horrified wire: "Our government has failed to denounce atrocities…the overworked term genocide is applicable." Later that week, the American table tennis team visited Red China. The anguished diplomat was soon recalled. The mutual debt—Yahya did Nixon's crucial errand with utmost discretion; Nixon allowed Yahya his massacre—was instrumental to a deal that MacMillan merely describes thus: "Although Yahya was increasingly preoccupied with the growing threat of secession by East Pakistan and the resulting tensions with India, he continued to act as intermediary."

At one point, she assures us that any discussion of an opening to China—and, not incidentally, the selling out of Taiwan—would have made it impossible: "The Chinese Communists, who had little understanding of how an open society worked, would have concluded that the American government was not sincere in wanting an opening and would have pulled back." At another, she betrays bafflement: "It has never been clear why the fact of Kissinger's trip to Beijing had to remain secret until it was over." She doesn't comprehend that the soul of the matter was otherwise: Nixon's and Kissinger's contempt for open civic discussion of America's role in the world was fundamental to who they were, and it was hardly an accident that the President most contemptuous of democracy was the one best able to forge friendships

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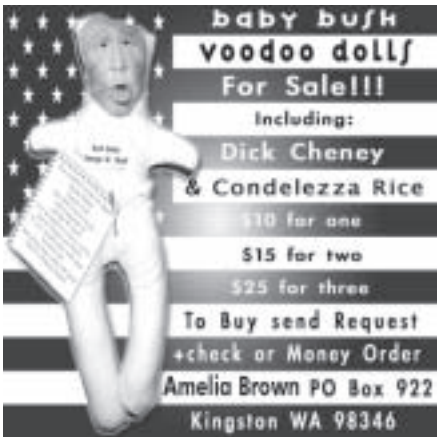

with the world's most savage dictators.

MacMillan treats the evidence as larkish diplomatic small talk: "To general laughter, Kissinger added, 'Wherever possible I will try to tell the truth'"; "Give me a pair of those," Nixon says upon being "shown earplugs that an emperor had worn to screen out criticisms"; Kissinger explains to Zhou En-lai why they couldn't tell anyone in the State Department how they were selling out Taiwan—"They had a complicated system in the United States, Kissinger said wryly; the Chinese did things in so much a simpler way." She skips over the moment, in Nixon and Mao's one meeting together, when the Chairman referred to "a reactionary group which is opposed to our contact with you. The result was that they got on an airplane and fled abroad." He was referring to an international mystery: the whereabouts of Mao's rival Lin Biao. He mentioned "corpses." Zhou hinted that it wasn't an accident. The cryptic exchange suggests that the Chairman was testing the President, gauging his level of squeamishness. Nixon—whose "ratfuckers" were then loose in New Hampshire, sabotaging the Democratic nomination—promises, "The Chairman can be sure that whatever we discuss, or whatever I and the Prime Minister discuss, nothing goes beyond the room."

Nixon *bonded* with these commissars. He empathized with them, and they with him. "Why is it in your country," Mao asked Kissinger on a later trip, "You are always obsessed with that nonsensical Watergate issue?" Democracy had nothing to do with it. Does it now? Peck writes of the 1950s-vintage China hands of their "unmistakable mixture of public interest and self-interest," a "commitment to 'public duty' and 'civic responsibility'" that "barely masked a naked grasp for power."

Read Tom Friedman: Our latter-day Wise Men are the same. "At this time, when democracies, like India and America, seem incapable of making hard decisions," he wrote in a 2005 column titled "Thou Shalt Not Destroy the Center," "I cannot help but feel a tinge of jealousy at China's ability to be serious about its problems and actually do things that are tough and require taking things away from people."

These China watchers always bear watching—for the times they forget to propagandize themselves. ■

FILMS

Good News From Romania?

STUART KLAWANS

12:08 EAST OF BUCHAREST

Hopeful news about Romanian cinema came from the Cannes festival last month—despite the oddness of that conjunction, "hopeful" and "Romanian"—thanks to the presence in the main competition of Cristian Mungiu's *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*. A tale from the final period of the Ceausescu regime concerning two college students, a cheap hotel room and an illegal abortion, Mungiu's film was awarded the Palme d'Or, making it the latest in a recent series of Romanian pictures to have won recognition at the festival, starting in 2005 with Cristi Puiu's *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu*.

Of course, as the filmmakers themselves will tell you, any talk of a Romanian New Wave would be wildly premature. *Mr. Lazarescu* played to literally dozens of people in the United States; while at home, the greatest good it did for Puiu was to free him to denounce the government funding agency. Hope is a relative thing. But just to show that it exists, here comes a 2006 Cannes award winner, Corneliu Porumboiu's self-produced *12:08 East of Bucharest*, which is now rolling out for a US theatrical release, starting at Film Forum in New York.

The 12:08 of the title refers to the moment on December 22, 1989, when Ceausescu stepped into a helicopter and fled his capital—an event that all of Romania watched live on television. In Porumboiu's bleakly hilarious film, set on the sixteenth anniversary of this abdication, the great event will once again be televised—but locally, as an item for discussion on a very small-time afternoon talk show. Instead of the rush of historic action, the show will offer viewers only the stasis of a photomural, placed behind the panelists

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as decor: a frozen, depopulated image of a city square somewhere east of Bucharest. Instead of broadcasting a turning point in the life of a nation, the show will worry at a parochial, absurdly undecided question: Was there a revolution in our town or not?

Apparently, Romania lacks the proverb "If you have to ask, don't mess with it." To help you understand why this wisdom might be wanting, and to let you appreciate the resulting mess in its fullness, Porumboiu devotes the first half of *12:08 East of Bucharest* to a tour of the town and an introduction to its citizens.

This part of the movie is shot in the internationally approved film-festival style of the blank stare: fixed camera, middle distance, no cutaways within the scene. It's not a mandatory style for Romania—in fact, Porumboiu will break with it later—but its effect in this first section seems true to form for the country. In my experience, Romanian films are often divided almost explicitly into a setup (which may demand patience) and a payoff (which may reward it). So it is with *12:08 East of Bucharest*, in which the first half, for all its implied drollery, will do little more than make you chuckle, in a sighing, Bill Murray kind of way.

Though they're as wised-up about people's motives and as avid for grunginess as the films of any other post-Soviet country, Romanian pictures don't traffic in the hectic fun that can accompany some other nations' cinematic forays into alcohol poisoning, or the sensitive juvenile viewpoints that can add a sweet pang to their atmosphere of despair. In the impeccably matter-of-fact setup of *12:08 East of Bucharest*, you first see Old Man Piscoci (Mircea Andreescu) from behind, silhouetted at his window at dawn as he sits alone, watching the streetlights blink off. Manescu (Ion Sapdaru), a history teacher in the local school, is first glimpsed prostrate on the sofa of his crumbling living room, where his legs evidently gave out the night before. (His wife, unsurprised and unpitying, walks into the frame with a telephone for him, dumps it and walks out again.) As for Jderescu (Teo Corban), the local talk-show host and television-station owner, you meet him just before breakfast, when he's already in his characteristic state of helpless, voluble exasperation. Standing in front of a small, neat, not particularly well-stocked bookshelf, he demands that his wife come in and find a handy dictionary for him so he can crib a classical reference from it and sound smart on the day's broadcast.

The rest of part one is an accumulation of details from the same chronic, citywide hangover. You learn how much money Manescu owes and to how many people; you find out that Piscoci has often played Santa Claus for the town's children and is outraged at the shabbiness of the only costume now available; you see that Jderescu's young girlfriend (and news anchor) is a lot less accommodating than his wife. But because these people are kept at a distance, with their faces often in shadow or their backs turned to you, the town itself seems to become the movie's main character—a shabby, distracted character at that. Its collective mind would prefer to be elsewhere: in China, perhaps (source of the celebratory firecrackers that kids keep flinging at people's doors), or in the Caribbean (home of the salsa music that a student band performs, with more enthusiasm than skill).

Was there a revolution in this place or not? The talk show begins—it will take up the entirety of part two, playing in real time—and Jderescu poses the question to the only guests he's managed to recruit, Manescu and Piscoci. They sit on either side of him, shoulder to shoulder, behind a desk placed square to the camera, ready to submit to the blank stare; but now that they're in the arrangement most appropriate to such visual sobriety, the picture abruptly gets drunk. You see close-ups for the first time, zooms, pans, jittery reframings and completely unmotivated explorations of the background photomural, all this being the work of the much-abused young fellow who serves as Jderescu's one-man camera crew. He has artistic ambitions.

What follows, within this suddenly liberated gaze, is as much choreography as conversation. Glum, dark-bearded, baggy-eyed Manescu hunches forward until he's speaking to the desktop; white-haired Piscoci leans back at his ease, a blithe smile on his nutcracker features; while Jderescu, sitting upright in the middle, tries to keep order by snatching papers from his guests, slapping their hands, hissing reprimands out of the corner of his mouth and confiscating Manescu's bottle, all the while keeping a pair of eyeglasses balanced halfway down his nose so he'll look like an intellectual. If revolution, at a minimum, is the breakdown of decorum within a civic space, then a very minor revolution is in fact taking place right in front of the town-square photomural.

But with all respect to Jderescu, the question remains: Was the town's uprising in 1989 more consequential, or in

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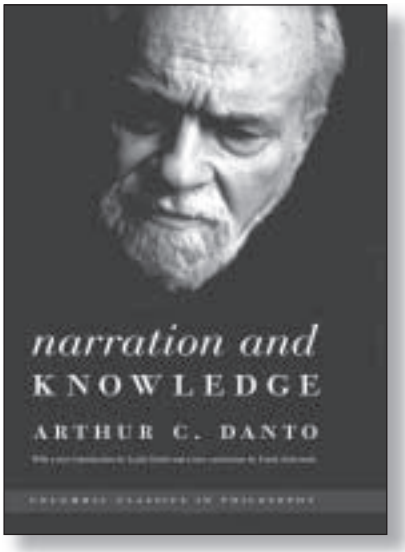

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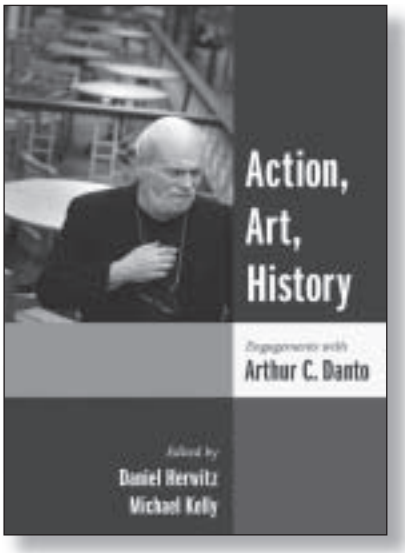

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any way riskier, than this little televisual revolution?

Piscoci says no. With comfortable good cheer, he recalls that he didn't venture into the town square until after he'd seen Ceausescu's fall on TV—and all he was expecting was Laurel and Hardy! Nobody else came into the town square either, until Ceausescu was safely gone; but that's all right, Piscoci says generously, because everybody makes the best revolution he can.

No, mutters Manescu. He insists that he came into the square and protested that morning, before 12:08. Nobody saw him—but he was there.

"Were you there?" Jderescu asks, over and over, as denials mount from the talk show's phone-in audience. Each time, Manescu pauses a little longer, swallowing a little more bile, before he answers, "Yes." The history teacher demands his bit role in history, even though it changed nothing for him. The talk-show host, who seems to have remade himself very nicely since 1989, refuses to believe that anything happened. And Santa Claus loves everybody.

You will laugh till the streetlights blink on again in the damp Romanian twilight.

Unseen at press time, but recommended anyway: Lynn Hershman Leeson's *Strange Culture*, which opens the eighteenth annual Human Rights Watch International Film Festival. Just on the basis of the program description, I can say this film perfectly summarizes the aspirations of the festival, because it's partly about art and partly about politics, partly documentary and partly dramatic, partly archival and even partly animated—and it's all basically true. A case study in official paranoia, *Strange Culture* tells the story of artist, college professor and activist Steve Kurtz, who phoned the paramedics one day in 2004 when his wife collapsed and wound up in the hands of FBI agents, who arrested him and his art materials on suspicion of bioterrorism.

On view in New York June 14–28 at Lincoln Center's Walter Reade Theater, then touring nationally, the festival this year offers another twenty features beyond *Strange Culture*, plus three shorts and a program of works in progress. Of the films I have seen, I can particularly recommend Sebastián Moreno Mardones's *The City of Photographers*, a truly revelatory documentary about the self-appointed Chilean photojournalists who recorded, and encouraged, protests against Pinochet in the 1980s. But that's only the beginning. For a complete schedule, visit www.hrw.org/iff or www.filmlinc.com. ■

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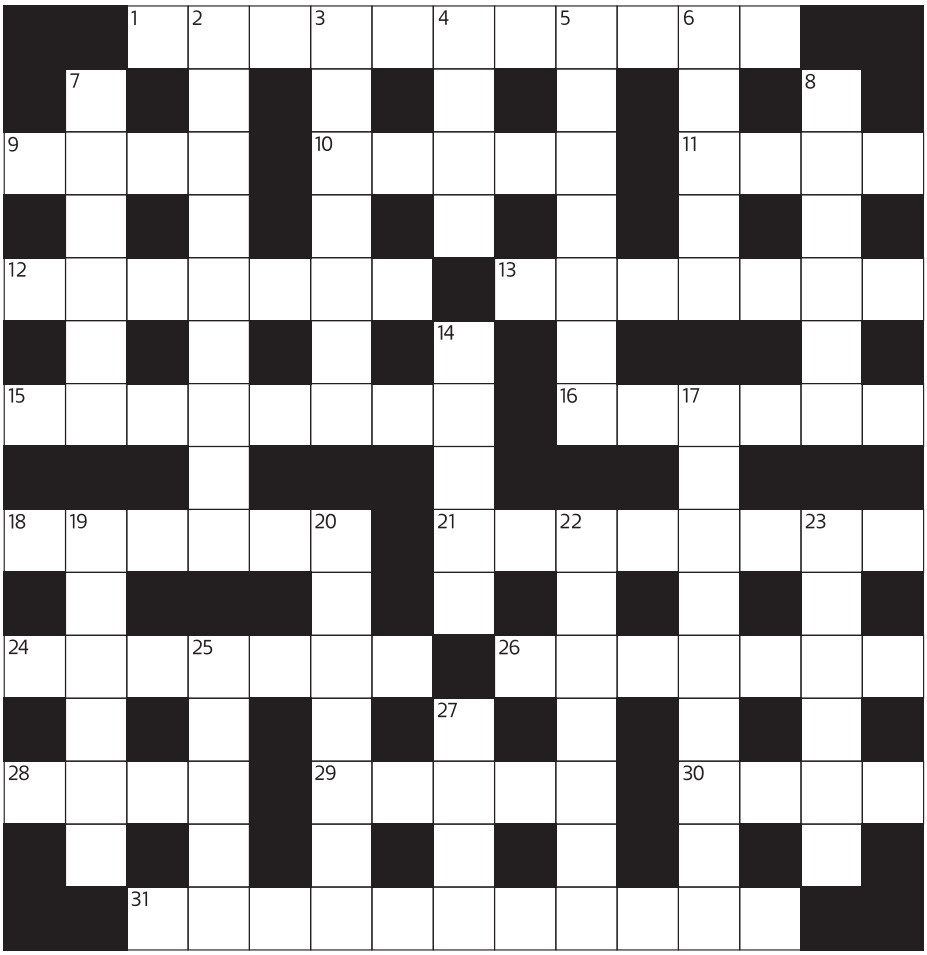


ACROSS

1 What a crab may do, however tail first. (If you're distributing it, pass the word!) (11)

9, 18 and **26** Old-fashioned ending to a missive by Mr. Heep? (4,6,7)

10 What the fine riding Lady had no matter what her travel agenda was. (5)

11 See 20 down

12 Perhaps paint the sort of ploy seen by the sea in France. (7)

13 Break into tears about the broken lute? One shouldn't show it even to animals! (7)

15 As a way to give a talk on an old deity, it's one of Michener's titles that made it to the screen. (8)

16 If you are, you can easily get around in Alabama. (6)

18 See 9

21 The kind of poker that tells you what a duck might do, when bobbing. (4-4)

24 One may take in the money—real money, that is. Right? (7)

26 See 9

28 and **30** Twist something out of shape a little way. (It may be a fighter.) (8)

29 Part of the psyche came first with it, and wasted a lot of time. (5)

30 See 28

31 Leaders in the timber industry, or just turtles? (11)

DOWN

2 It's usually rather hot with what might make the parting work on a horse. (9)

3 A casual worker takes time with what might be a paint job. (7)

4 and **14** Such an effort may be hopeless, having misplaced effect. (4,5)

5 A couple of animals responsible for bookbinding. (7)

6 A sorry state, but connoisseurs should have it good! (5)

7 The place in South America has a soggy spot, with a "wild oat" finish… (6)

8 Broken plates might still cause a good drawing. (6)

14 See 4

17 Eggs might, when really muddled. (9)

19 A fair chance one is a Mormon, but a handful should show it. (6)

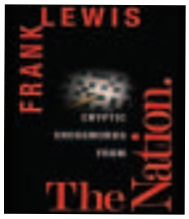
20 and **11** across Leveling out the main character at the end of the day? (7,4)

22 A library book might be finished and responsible for the effect. (7)

23 Often associated with dining, to come first with a gin sling. (6)

25 One of those dancers in *Fantasia* has a joint on the river. (5)

27 A two-toned aspersion? (4)



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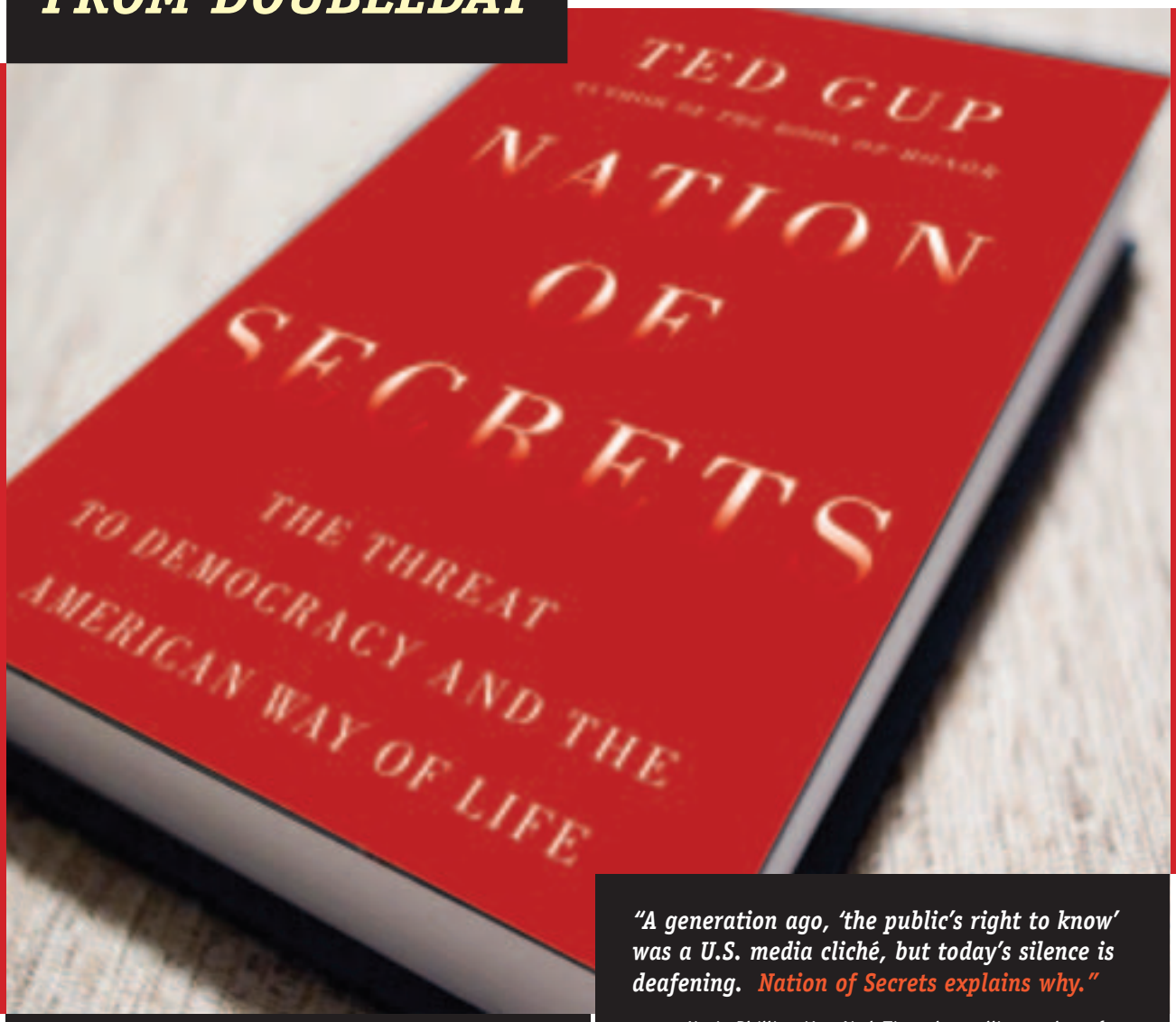

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